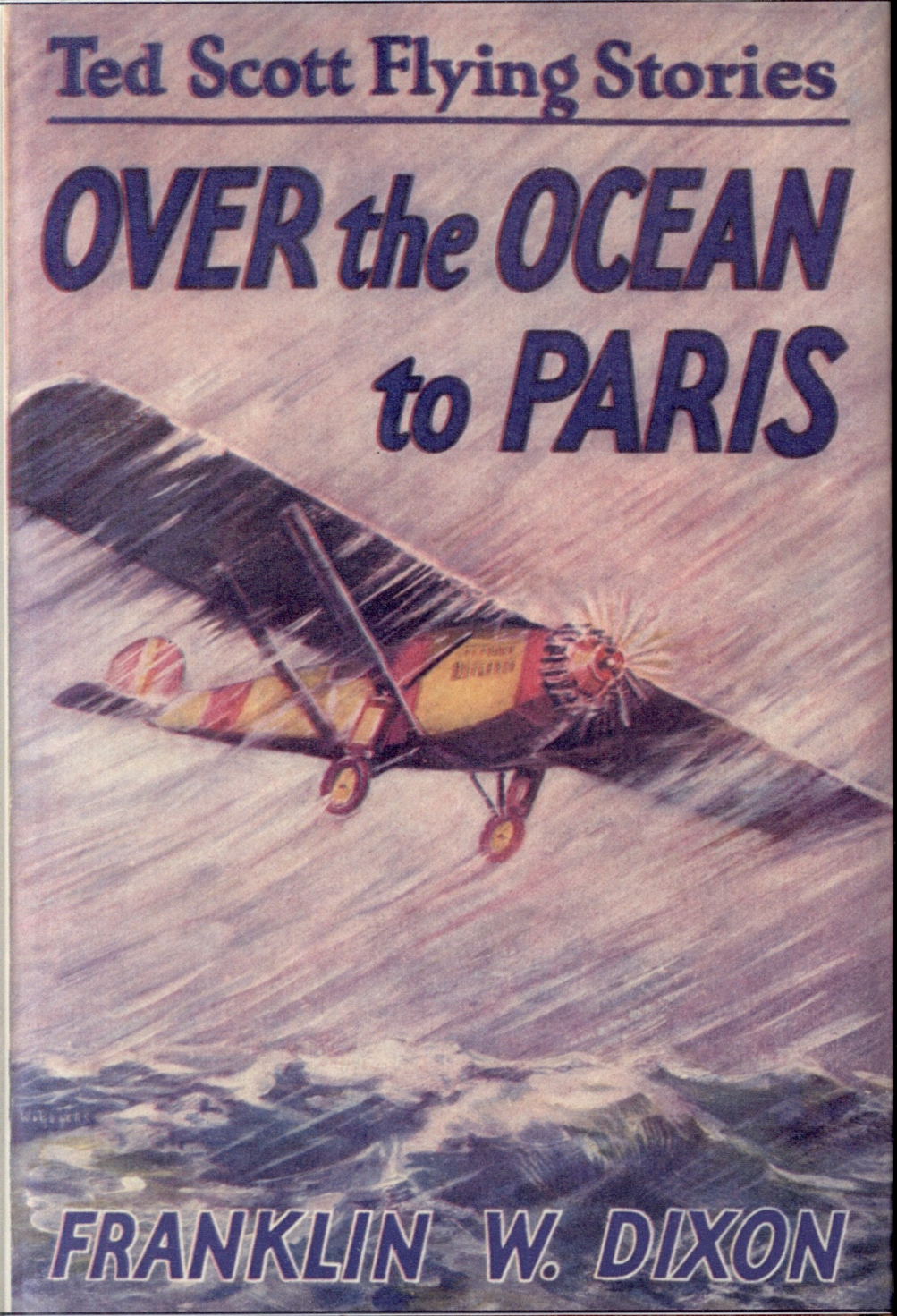
Ted Scott Flying Stories

OVER the OCEAN to PARIS



FRANKLIN W. DIXON

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By FRANKLIN W. DIXON

With Individual Colored Wrappers and illustrations, by Walter S. Rogers

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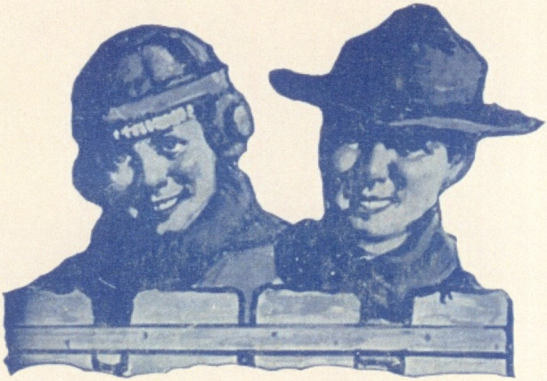

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OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS

F·W·
DIXON

Ted Scott
Flying Stories

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OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS

Ted Scott
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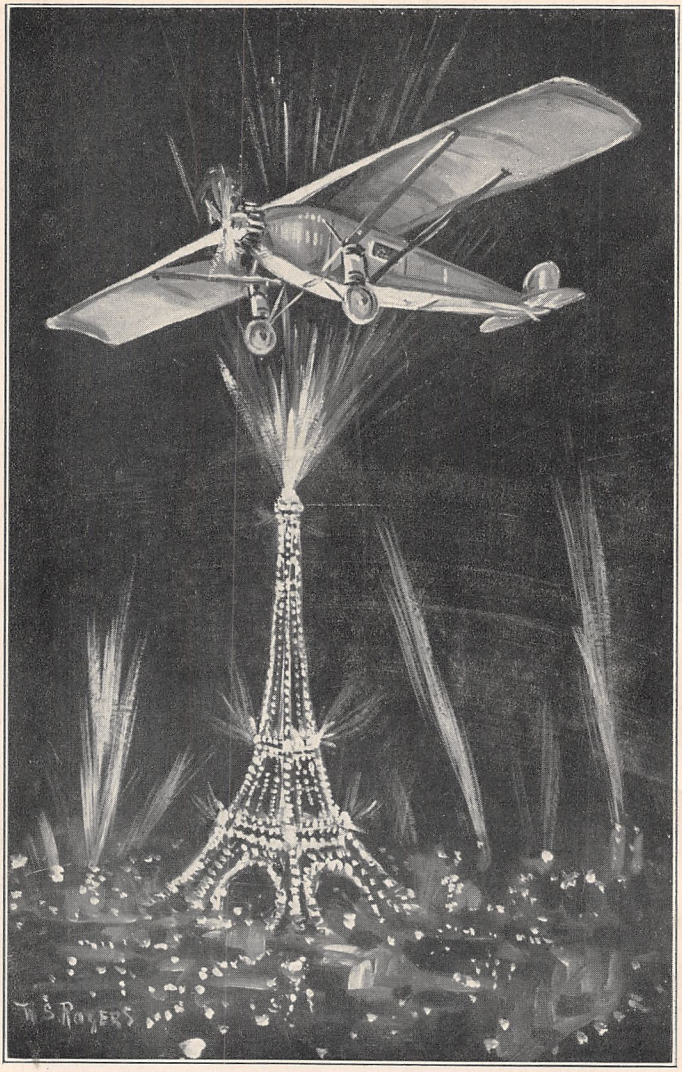

HE WAS FLYING DIRECTLY OVER PARIS.

Over the Ocean to Paris. *Frontispiece.*

THE TED SCOTT FLYING STORIES

OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS

OR

TED SCOTT'S DARING LONG-DISTANCE FLIGHT

By

FRANKLIN W. DIXON

AUTHOR OF
"RESCUED IN THE CLOUDS,"
"OVER THE ROCKIES WITH THE AIR MAIL,"
"THE HARDY BOYS: THE TOWER TREASURE," ETC.

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12mo. Cloth. Illustrated.

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OVER THE OCEAN TO PARIS

CHAPTER I

In Terrible Danger

"Gee, but I'd like to be up there!" exclaimed Ted Scott, as he gazed upward at a number of airplanes flying like so many white-winged birds over the Bromville aviation field.

"Not so keen about it myself," laughed Mark Lawson. "Might come down in too much of a hurry. I'm not looking for an early grave."

"Where do you get that stuff?" demanded Ted. "You don't mind riding in an automobile. Yet every time you step into a car you take your life in your hands."

"That's different," replied Mark. "If you get in an auto accident, you may get off with some bruises or a shaking-up. At any rate, you've got a chance. But if anything goes wrong up in the sky, you have no chance at all."

"Plenty of chances," retorted Ted. "Nine times out of ten you can volplane to safety if you keep your head. Read of that fellow the other day whose engine went dead when he was thirteen thousand feet up in the clouds? He just grabbed his parachute, stepped off into space, and floated down to earth as light as a feather."

"Yes," agreed Mark skeptically. "But suppose the parachute had refused to open? They do sometimes, you know. Then it would have been a case of a lily in his hands and the friends passing round the bier to take a look at the remains."

"At any rate, he'd have lived," persisted Ted. "Perhaps he'd have had more thrills in his short life than others who'd lived on to seventy or more. Oh, of course there's danger in flying. But so there is in anything that's worth while. I'm going to be a flyer myself some day."

"Have it your own way," replied Mark. "But good old terra cotta—I mean terra firma—for mine. I'm satisfied to make airplanes and have somebody else fly them. But look at this crowd! Old Bromville never had so many people in it before. I'll bet some of them have come a hundred miles. And all of them looking up into the sky! There'll be a lot of stiff necks to-morrow."

It was indeed the biggest day that Brom-

ville, a thriving town of about twenty thousand inhabitants in the Middle West on the Rappock River, had ever seen. A "flying circus" had come to town, and a host of airplanes of all makes and sizes, monoplanes, biplanes, triplanes, many of them with pilots of national reputation, were gliding through the skies, performing stunts that brought the hearts of the spectators into their mouths.

The celebration had been staged chiefly through the efforts of the Devally-Hipson Aero Corporation, whose great plant for the manufacture of airplanes covered many acres in the outskirts and was the chief commercial enterprise of the little city.

Part of the expense involved, however, was borne by the proprietor of the new Hotel Excelsior, which on that day threw its doors open to the public and wanted to make it a memorable occasion. The hotel, owned by Brewster Gale, was a palatial one, up to the minute in every detail of comfort and luxury and exceeded by nothing in the State. Adjoining it was a new golf course, constructed at great expense, beautifully laid out, which, it was hoped, would attract golf enthusiasts from all parts of the Union and be the scene of many championship tournaments with all the resultant benefit to the hotel itself. Most of the stock in the golf course, which had cost hundreds of thousands, was also owned by Gale, who was

by far the richest man in town, though rumor had it that much of his wealth had been amassed in ways that would not bear close inspection.

No better day than this could have been chosen for the celebration. The sun was bright and there was but little wind. There was not a cloud in the sky, and the convolutions of the flyers were plainly visible to all. The airmen themselves were in fine fettle, and outdid themselves in daring feats. There were nose spins, tail spins, pretended falls, loop the loops that kept the crowd gasping.

Mark clutched Ted's arm.

"Look at that auto coming on the field," he said. "I wonder what's coming off?"

In the rakish roadster to which Mark called his comrade's attention a woman sat beside the driver. As the car stopped in the middle of the field she stood up and cast aside her cloak. She was lithe and slender, clothed in a white tight-fitting costume and wearing a red liberty cap.

Her eyes searched the skies and the spectators followed the direction of her gaze.

High up was a biplane from which a ladder of rope was hanging. The biplane circled the field several times, coming lower and lower with each revolution, until it was at a height of about fifty feet and flying directly over the car.

The woman braced herself. The lower rung of the ladder almost brushed the top of the car. The woman leaped, caught the lower rung and was swept off into space.

A shout of mingled wonder and consternation went up as the biplane rose into the sky, carrying with it the daring performer on the ladder that was describing a tremendous arc in the ether, as though endeavoring to shake her off.

If the rung should break! If her grip should loosen!

But the fortune that favors the brave was with her. She swung herself up in a sitting position on the lower rung. Holding on with one hand, she blew kisses to the spectators.

Then suddenly the hand that was holding the rope let go and she fell backwards!

A groan of horror rose from the throng and many in the crowd covered their eyes with their hands to shut out the sight of a tragedy.

But a sigh of relief chased away the terror when they saw that she had let herself go on purpose and that her feet were twined about the side ropes.

Now hundreds of feet above the earth, for the plane had risen rapidly, she swung back and forth, head downward, her long golden tresses swaying in the wind.

For a full minute thus she thrilled the crowd.

Then she pulled herself up, climbed nimbly up the rope ladder and into the plane.

For the first time the multitude dared breathe.

"If that isn't flirting with death, I'd like to know what is!" gasped Mark, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"But she got away with it," replied Ted. "Gee, that little rascal has her nerve with her!"

"And she isn't through yet!" exclaimed Mark. "Just look at her!"

For the woman, after a moment's rest, had risen and was climbing one of the struts of the biplane.

She reached the top and stood erect, outlined against the sky. Then on that speeding platform she commenced to dance, whirling about and about, a symphony of grace and beauty.

The dance completed, she waved to the spectators, slid down the strut and took her place in the fuselage beside the pilot while a roar of applause from the crowd rose thunderously to where she sat in triumph.

"This is no place for anyone with heart weakness," commented Mark.

"Most exciting thing I ever saw in my life," replied Ted. "You've got to hand it to her. But don't forget the part the pilot played in that, the close figuring in bringing the ladder just within her reach, the way in which he had

to keep the plane balanced while she was dancing."

"I guess there's glory enough for both," agreed Mark. "But I'd rather go into a cage of leopards than risk my life in a stunt like that."

Down the runway came a plane which had been tuning up on the ground. It gathered speed as it came and within two hundred yards of the end of the runway soared into the air and rose like a great bird into the skies.

It was a beautiful take-off, and a murmur of admiration went up that was speedily lost in a cry of consternation.

At the last moment the wheel on one side had buckled and now swung uselessly beneath the plane. That on the other side was still intact.

"Look! Look!" cried Ted, pointing. "His landing gear is broken. How is he ever going to get down?"

"In for a smash, sure," said Mark excitedly, for both Ted and he knew what was likely to happen when the aviator was forced to make a landing with only the wheel on one side working.

"And there are two little girls in that plane!" cried Ted. "The pilot's children that he's taking up for a little joy ride."

Neither the aviator nor his mechanic was aware of the danger that threatened. They had not noticed the accident and were sailing

along blithely, while it could be seen that the little girls were delighted at their great adventure.

The significance of the break had been lost on most of the spectators. But every pilot and mechanic on the field knew what it meant. They signaled frantically to the aviator in the hope of letting him know what had happened.

One man rushed to a plane standing on the ground and pointed to the wheel and then up to the plane above, trying to explain in dumb show. Still there was no sign from the plane high in the air.

Then other pilots jumped into their machines and took off hurriedly, rising in the air until they came near the damaged plane, pointing to the wheel that hung slack beneath the machine.

Now the pilot of the biplane knew. His cheeks blanched as he look at his little girls. What would happen when the plane came down?

Under normal conditions he would have to strike the ground going at a rate of thirty-five miles an hour, in order to avoid the shock of contact with the ground, and from then on gradually bring the wheels to a stop.

But with the wheel on one side gone, the chances were that the plane would strike the ground at once on that side, turn a somersault,

or smash completely. And his little girls were with him.

But he did and said nothing to alarm the little ones. He spoke briefly to his mechanic, and the latter climbed out over the side of the plane, hanging head downward to see if he could reach and perhaps repair the damaged landing gear.

But a glance told him that it was a hopeless task, and with a groan he withdrew.

In the meantime there was intense activity below. A squad of police cleared the field so as to give plenty of room for the descent. An ambulance, hastily summoned, drew up. Nurses and doctors were ready to extend first aid.

Now the plane was coming down in slow wide circles, while the hearts of the lookers-on constricted with fear.

"The odds are a hundred to one against him!" groaned Mark, as he watched the plane with a dreadful fascination.

"He's got just one chance," muttered Ted, whose face was as white as ashes. "If he tips the plane at exactly the right angle, he may run along on one wheel until he loses momentum. But to do that will take almost a miracle."

Perhaps it was a miracle. Perhaps it was the presence of the little girls with their gay

faces and happy laughter that told the agonized father that he must not, *must not* fail.

He threw the plane at a certain angle as the wheel struck the ground, ran along some hundreds of feet, and with scarcely a jar came to a stop! Then the plane flopped over on one side. But that did not matter—then.

The pilot leaped out, caught the laughing children as they jumped into his arms and deposited them tenderly on the ground. Then he sat down suddenly.

The crowd broke over him, laughing, hysterical, some of the women sobbing as they fondled the children, the men husky as they clapped the man on the shoulder and applauded his superb exhibition of nerve and skill.

It was some time before the crowd dispersed and the damaged plane was trundled to its shed for repairs.

"If a fellow's looking for thrills, a flying field's the place to come!" exclaimed Mark.

"Right you are," agreed Ted enthusiastically. "But if we're getting them on the ground, what must those fellows be having up in the sky? I tell you, Mark, I'm going to be one of them some day. Look out!" he warned, as he jumped back quickly, dragging Mark with him. "That plane's coming down with a rush."

A flyer who had had engine trouble was vol-

planing down for a landing. The crowd scattered to give him room.

All but one middle-aged man, who, in an attitude of absorption, walked directly in front of the machine that had now touched the ground and was rushing along at express train speed.

"He'll be killed!" yelled Mark.

With a bound like a leopard's, Ted leaped for the man.

CHAPTER II

Trouble Brewing

Warned by the yells of the crowd, the absent-minded man looked up to see the plane coming toward him like a Juggernaut.

Paralyzed at the awful death threatening him, he stood rooted to the spot. Then an arm shot out and a muscular hand jerked him backward with such force that both he and his rescuer fell to the ground, barely missing the wing of the plane as the machine swept past.

It was a fearfully narrow escape. Ted Scott was the first to rise, and assisted the other to get on his feet.

"Afraid I've got you all covered with dust," grinned Ted, as he reached down and recovered the man's hat and handed it to him.

The man ignored the hat and clasped one of Ted's hands in both of his own.

"You are brave. You are quick," he said in good English, but with a pronounced French accent. "You have saved my life. How can I thank you enough?"

"Oh, you don't need to thank me," replied Ted, whose modesty was equal to his courage. "I only did what anybody would do. I was nearest you and had the chance, that's all."

"But I will not have you dismiss it as lightly as that," protested the man earnestly. "You risked your life to save mine. I shall never forget it. I must know at least the name of my preserver."

"My name is Ted Scott."

"And do you live here?"

"Yes," replied Ted. "I live at the Bromville House."

"Oh, yes," responded the stranger. "The old hotel down near the river. I know where it is. My name is Monet—Paul Monet. I am one of the guests of the Hotel Excelsior."

Ted nodded. He had guessed as much from the start. If the man had been a citizen of the town, Ted would have known him, for he knew almost everybody in Bromville.

"I can never pay you for what you have done for me," continued Mr. Monet, "but," as he drew a check and fountain pen from his pocket, "if you will let me in some small way show my gratitude—" he hesitated as he saw a slow red creeping into the lad's cheeks.

"Thank you just as much, Mr. Monet," replied Ted quietly, "but I couldn't take money for a thing like that. Just take it that I had

the luck to do you a service and let it go at that."

Monet looked disappointed, but he was a gentleman and appreciated the boy's feeling, and he put the checkbook back in his pocket.

"As you say," he replied. "But perhaps there is some other way in which I can be of service to you. I have a good many business interests. If there is any special ambition in your mind, I might be able to further it. Or perhaps I might get you some kind of employment that you would prefer to what you have. I hope you will command me in every possible way."

"It's mighty good of you, Mr. Monet, and I appreciate it," Ted replied. "But I'll just jog along and do the best I can for myself."

"What you Americans call 'paddle your own canoe,' eh?" said Mr. Monet, with his quizzical smile. "Well, I suppose it's that spirit that's made you the great people that you are. But you'll surely not deny me your friendship?"

"You have that already," answered Ted, who was really strongly drawn toward the man he had rescued.

"Good!" said Mr. Monet. "I want to know you better, much better. I hope you will come to see me at the Hotel Excelsior and have dinner with me. I will be glad to show you

through the hotel and grounds. They are very fine."

"All right, I'll come sometime," promised Ted, as they shook hands and parted.

Ted felt that he had not accepted the invitation any too graciously, perhaps. But there was a reason. He liked Mr. Monet, but he had no use for the Hotel Excelsior. He never heard the name without a feeling of bitterness.

For the erection of that hotel in Bromville meant soon or late the ruin of the old Bromville House, which could never stand the competition that would be given to it by the new caravansary. And the ruin of the Bromville House meant beggary for its proprietor, old Eben Browning, Ted's foster father.

Who his real father and mother were, Ted did not know. During his earliest years he had lived with a certain James Wilson and his wife Miranda. They had told him little or nothing of his origin or family. They had treated him kindly enough and had fed and clothed him and sent him to school up to the time he was ten years old. Then they had died within a few months of each other, and Ted had been taken in charge by Eben Browning, the proprietor of the Bromville House and his wife, Charity.

They had no children of their own, and Ted had soon found his place in their hearts.

They were goodness itself to him, and he speedily came to regard them as his father and mother.

In its day the Bromville House had been the leading hotel of the little town. It was a rambling two-story structure, with rooms which, though plainly furnished, were always kept spotless and comfortable. The cooking, too, under the direction of Charity, had been of the best. Eben was a genial landlord and had a host of friends among the fishermen who came to try their luck in the Rappock River—famous for its trout—and the traveling salesmen liked to stop there when in town.

But with the rapid growth of Bromville had come many changes. What was good enough for the traveling public in the simpler days was not good enough now. One or two more pretentious and up to date hotels had been erected and taken a great deal of Eben's trade. The Bromville House needed a new coat of paint. The furniture was old and shabby, but the cost of replacing it with new was beyond the reach of Eben's dwindling resources. Modern competition was proving too much for the old couple. And now the crowning blow had come with the erection of the Hotel Excelsior with its palatial splendor, rich furnishings and attached golf course. All the traveling men would go to it now, for

the prestige of their firms as well as for their personal comfort. The fishermen and others of Eben's cronies would still go to the Bromville House for old times' sake. But they were not sufficient to maintain it, and Eben found himself on the brink of bankruptcy.

But it was not mere envy that made Eben foam at the mouth when the Hotel Excelsior was mentioned. He could perhaps have borne the blow philosophically if it had been a case of honest opposition. But it was far from that.

For Eben, in his prosperous days, had owned all the land on which the Hotel Excelsior and the golf grounds were now located. The town was small then and property was not worth so much as it rapidly became when the Aero Corporation had established its mammoth plant.

Still it had been worth a tidy sum when Brewster Gale had begun dickering for it. Eben had never liked Gale, but his money had seemed as good as that of anyone else, and he had listened to the proposition. They had settled on a sum, of which only a small part was to be paid in cash. This cash payment Eben had received, but had never obtained a cent more. Through a bewildering series of sleight-of-hand tricks, engineered by Gale and the unscrupulous lawyers he hired—holding companies, reorganizations, forced sales,

technicalities, all the devices by which scoundrels defraud honest men, while still managing to steer clear of jail—some way and somehow, that poor, bewildered Eben even now could not understand, he found himself divested of equity in the property, with Gale "sitting pretty" with what seemed to be a clear title.

So, owning the ground which had now become immensely valuable, it had been an easy matter for Gale to finance the building of the great hotel which now threatened to wipe the old Bromville House out of existence.

Even now, if Eben had had enough capital, he might have been able to make a legal battle for his rights. But he was practically without a dollar, and it takes money to fight a complicated case through the courts against the legal batteries his opponent was able to command. At best it could be spun out for years with the final result uncertain.

So Eben had to face approaching bankruptcy with no means in sight to avert it.

The struggle wrung Ted's heart and he shared the old man's bitterness for Brewster Gale. With all his boy's strength he had sought to be of help about the old hotel. Then, when an opportunity offered, he had found a job in the works of the Devally-Hipson Aero Corporation. All his wages, except the smallest possible sum needed for his personal ex-

penses, he turned over to Eben in an attempt to stave off the evil day of failure.

Ted, tall, slender, with brown hair and eyes, was a natural mechanic and, despite his youth, made marked progress in the plant. At first he had worked on a machine, had then gone into the assembling department, and was now employed in the last stages of putting the planes together. He loved his work, loved everything connected with flying, and was fully determined to become an aviator as soon as possible.

Leaving Mr. Monet and trying to get the distasteful thought of the Hotel Excelsior out of his mind, Ted was turning away with Mark when he was hailed by Bill Ellison, one of the foremen at the Aero plant.

"Hey, Ted!" called Bill, "suppose you go down to the other end of the field and keep your eyes on those monoplanes we've trotted out for exhibition. There's a lot of kids swarming around there like flies, and they might fool with the controls or start something."

"All right, Mr. Ellison," responded Ted promptly, "I'll go right down. Coming along, Mark?" he asked, turning to his companion.

"I'll be along in a few minutes," replied Mark. "There's a fellow here in the crowd that I want to see."

Ted hurried down to the part of the field in-

dicated. The small boys had indeed congregated there in numbers, but Ted shooed them away good-naturedly. They obeyed readily because they knew and liked him.

"This job looks like a cinch," said Ted to himself. "I'll be able to keep an eye on the planes and still see what's going on overhead."

But just then he caught sight of two flashily dressed young men who were making themselves very much at home with one of the finest monoplanes the firm turned out, a type that was its special joy and pride.

He walked rapidly down to where they stood with their backs toward him.

"Sorry," said Ted, pleasantly enough, "but I'll have to ask you to leave the plane alone."

CHAPTER III

Two Against One

At the sound of Ted Scott's voice, the young men turned about and viewed him with an arrogant stare.

"Who in thunder are you to tell us what to do?" demanded one of them.

"I guess you don't know who we are," said the other, regarding Ted as though he were a particularly obnoxious kind of insect.

"I know perfectly well who you are," replied Ted quietly. "You're Greg and Duck Gale. But who you are doesn't make any difference. I am in charge of these planes, and my orders are not to let anybody touch them."

The meddlers looked at Ted and then at each other and burst out into raucous laughter.

"Well, of all the nerve!" exclaimed one.

"He needs a lesson," declared the other.

Gregory and Duckworth Gale—Greg and Duck for short—were young men a trifle older than Ted. They were twins and sons of Brew-

ster Gale, the proprietor of the Hotel Excelsior. Both had red hair, big teeth, coarse features and were gaudily attired. Not only were they physically alike, but the resemblance extended to their moral qualities, or perhaps their lack of them. They had had too much money to spend, and their features were already marked by dissipation.

Ted flushed beneath their insulting scrutiny, but did not recede a step from his position.

"As to lessons, I can give them perhaps as well as take them," he responded to their last remark. "But that's neither here nor there. My foreman told me to look after these planes and keep everybody away from them, and I'm going to do it."

"Perhaps you've bitten off more than you can chew," said Greg tauntingly.

"Maybe," replied Ted carelessly. "But I'm from Missouri and will have to be shown."

"From Missouri, eh?" jeered Duck. "I thought you were from the Bromville House, that old dump down by the river that we're going to put out of business."

"'Dump' is right," put in Greg, with a nasty laugh. "Of all the forsaken apologies for a hotel—"

"Stop right there, Greg Gale," commanded Ted, his color rising. "I don't stand for that

kind of talk from you or anybody else. At least the owner of that hotel is honest."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Greg, clenching his fist threateningly.

"Ask your father," retorted Ted, his blood boiling as he thought of Eben Browning's wrongs. "Perhaps he'll understand."

"Look here, Duck," snarled Greg, "are we going to stand for that kind of talk from this shrimp?"

"Not by a jugful!" responded Duck. "We'll show him where he gets off."

The twins advanced a step toward Ted, who, however, did not back an inch. There was something in his attitude that gave them pause. They hesitated and looked at each other uncertainly.

"Well, what are you going to do?" asked Ted. "You don't seem as hot as you were a moment ago."

"I'm going to call your bluff," replied Greg, after another moment of indecision.

He leaned over deliberately and touched the control lever of the monoplane.

"Now what's the watchdog of the planes going to do?" he asked, with a sneering smile.

The smile was wiped off his face when Ted made a bound, grabbed him by the collar, and hurled him away with such force that he measured his length on the grass.

With a roar of fury he scrambled to his

feet and, together with Duck, rushed at Ted.

"Here, what's all this about?" came a sharp voice, and big Bill Ellison shouldered his way between the brothers and Ted, who, with his fists clenched, was calmly awaiting the attack.

"Never you mind," snarled Greg, as he attempted to push Bill aside. "You keep out of it. This is our funeral."

"Is that so?" asked big Bill, as he pushed him back as though he had been a feather. "Maybe it will be your funeral, at that. It certainly won't be anyone else's."

"I guess you don't know who we are," put in Duck truculently.

"Two young loafers, I should say at a guess," responded Bill. "Oh, yes, I know your names. And I know that your father's rich. But that doesn't cut any ice with me. Now what's all this fuss about, Ted?" he asked, turning to the lad.

"They were fooling with the monoplane there and I asked them to leave it alone," replied Ted. "Then this fellow," pointing to Greg, "handled the control and asked me what I was going to do about it."

"And you showed him," grinned Bill, as he viewed Greg's disarranged tie and his clothing, covered with dust. "You did just right, Ted. Now," turning to the discomfited brothers, "you clear out. These planes are here to be looked at, not to be fooled with. Get me?"

They "got" him readily enough, as Bill was big and strong enough to break them in two.

"We'll get you yet, Ted Scott," snarled Greg, as they began to move away slowly.

"And when we do you'll wish you'd never been born," added Duck viciously.

"Whenever you like," retorted Ted carelessly.

"Them young snakes are full of poison," mused Bill, as he looked after them. "They're the worst young rascals in this town. Keep your eyes peeled, Ted."

"I will, Mr. Ellison, but I'm not afraid of them," promised Ted. "They're both yellow."

"But yellow dogs can put over some dirty tricks," warned Bill. "Well, I'll be goin' now. Just stay here with the planes a while."

He moved off, just as Mark, together with Jack Forrest and Breck Lewis, employed in the aero plant with Ted and warm friends of his, came up.

"Hear you've had a little run in with those Gale peaches," grinned Mark. "Sorry I wasn't here to take a hand."

"It would be a pleasure to polish those birds off," put in Breck.

"They're singing small enough just now, I guess," laughed Ted, as he gave them the details of the encounter, to which they listened with keen relish.

Then for a little while they let the incident

pass out of their minds, engrossed as they were with the wonders of the flying circus.

Ted never wearied of marveling at the skill with which the pilots manipulated their planes. It seemed like magic. The mere touch of a lever, and the plane acted like a thing alive. Swooping down until it seemed almost certain that it would strike the ground, then turning and climbing up to dizzy altitudes until it seemed a mere speck against the sky, then descending again and floating along like a swan across a lake of fleecy clouds, it captured his imagination and filled him with untold longing.

He pictured himself up in those uncharted lanes of ether while the world lay like a panorama beneath him, over lakes and rivers, valleys and mountains, yes, and perhaps over yeasty surges of the ocean. It seemed to him that, if he ever realized that dream, he would be king of the world.

And why shouldn't he? Others had done it, who, he felt convinced in his heart, were no more skilful or courageous than himself. If they could fly through the sky, why should he be left on the earth, eating his heart out with longing?

He would do it! He *would* do it! All the manifold longings he had felt were now gathered up into a fierce determination. Come what would, he, Ted Scott, would take his place among the fliers of the skies!

As he wended his way home, his heart was full of weaving fancies. But as he noted the crowds dispersing his elation faded, and a dull ache took possession of him.

For the great throng of transients was moving almost in a mass toward the Hotel Excelsior. They poured up its broad, tree-shaded walks in a veritable procession. Crowds of richly dressed people were moving about on the marble verandas. From a pavilion came the stirring strains of a brass band.

And practically none, outside of a few old cronies, moving toward the old Bromville House!

"Dump," Duckworth Gale had called it. "Forsaken apology for a hotel," Greg had named it.

Ted clenched his fists instinctively.

CHAPTER IV

A Growing Hope

"Well, Ted," said Eben Browning, owner of the Bromville House, as the lad came up the steps of the old hotel, "I see you're back again. S'pose you've had a great day at the flying field?"

"Yes, Dad," replied Ted, for he had fallen into the habit of addressing the old folks as though they were his real father and mother. "Never had such a good time in my life. Gee, you ought to have seen some of those stunts! They'd have made your hair stand on end."

"Ain't got many hairs to do that trick," replied Eben, smiling faintly, as he rubbed the thin thatch on his partially bald head.

He was a medium-sized man, of kindly face seamed with many wrinkles. Some of those wrinkles had been formed by laughter in the good old days when he had been the proprietor of a prosperous hotel and a man of some consequence in the community. But more of them

had come from the anxiety that had attended him in these later days when he had seen the portentous shadow of the poorhouse looming up before him.

"I'd have liked to see those stunts," continued Eben, "but me an' Mother have been pretty busy gettin' everything to rights in case there was a crowd here to-night. Don't seem as though there was many comin', though," he added wistfully, as his old eyes peered up the street that was almost empty of pedestrians.

"It's a teeny bit early yet," put in his wife, Charity, a sweet-faced old lady, whose faded eyes had once been bright when she was the belle of the town. "I shouldn't wonder if they'd be along later."

"Sure they will," agreed Ted stoutly, though his heart sank. He knew too well that, although an occasional straggler might come in, there would be no "crowd" at the Bromville House that night.

And what wonder, he asked himself, as he looked about him at the sagging veranda and the steps sadly in need of a coat of paint, though scrupulously clean.

He had done all he could to make the place attractive. He had kept the little lawn closely cropped and had planted flowers where he could. Part of his meagre earnings had gone for a new sign, of which he had been intensely

proud at first, but which now, as he looked at it, he realized only emphasized by contrast the general run-down condition of the place.

Why should anyone with means come here when a little way off lay that luxurious hotel, the Excelsior, with its bright lights, its splendid rooms, its soft chairs, its sumptuous rugs, its gay company, the great lawn outside sprinkled with Japanese lanterns like so many fireflies and the pavilion with its band?

Poor Eben! Poor Charity! A lump rose in his throat as he looked at the old couple who had been father and mother to him since he was ten years old. If he could only make their lives easier! If he could only lift the tremendous burden that was crushing all sweetness out of their existence!

Again that fierce determination welled up in him that he *would* change the current of their lives. He knew the enormous rewards that sometimes waited on flying. These purses offered of ten thousand, twenty thousand, sometimes fifty thousand dollars for feats of skill, endurance flights, long distance flights and the like. Other men had won them. He might win them. A single one of those purses would make this couple who had been so good to him happy for life.

It was of them Ted Scott thought when money came into the calculation, not of himself. Not but that he wanted money and knew

its value. But it was love of adventure rather than the rewards that went with victory that was chiefly in his mind when he thought of himself.

"I s'pose there was a raft of people goin' up to the Hotel Excelsior," remarked Eben tentatively.

"Quite a few," agreed Ted. "Curiosity to see the new place, I suppose, had a lot to do with it."

"They say everything's grand up there," put in Charity, with a sigh.

"I suppose so," conceded Ted. "I haven't seen it myself, and I don't want to. I'll have to be up there one night this week though, because I promised."

"How is that?" asked Eben.

In reply Ted told the Brownings briefly of his meeting with Mr. Monet, glossing over as much as possible the part he had played in the latter's rescue.

"Oh, you dear boy, you might have been killed!" exclaimed Charity, giving him an affectionate hug.

"Those born to be hanged will never be killed by an airplane," grinned Ted, as he returned the caress.

"Someone was tellin' me that you had a mix-up with them Gale boys," observed Eben, almost choking on the name.

"Came near it," replied Ted, with a smile.

"I yanked Greg away from one of the machines he was fooling with, and they both set out to trim me."

"The feller that was tellin' me said you didn't turn a hair," went on Eben, with a ring of pride in his voice. "Was ready to take both of them on."

"Oh, the two of them might have licked me," returned Ted modestly; "but at least they'd have had a run for their money."

"I'm glad that you made them look cheap," said Eben. "Them Gales are no good, the whole kit an' bilin' of 'em. An' that crook, Brewster Gale, is the worst of them all. Look at what he's done to me," he added, as he rose and paced the floor in agitation. "He's cheated me, bamboozled me—"

"There, there now, Eben," soothed Charity mildly. "You mustn't get excited. I'm always afraid that you might get a stroke. And you know the Lord tells us we must forgive our enemies."

"It's a mighty hard thing to do, just the same," returned her husband, "when you see yourself goin' down hill an' likely to end up on the county farm. All that property on which the Hotel Excelsior stands and the golf links, too, is mine by rights, 'cept for the measly bit o' cash I got as the first payment. The dirty hound! But I'll get even with him yet!"

" 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord,' " Charity reminded him softly.

"Don't you mind, Dad," said Ted, alarmed at the purple flush that covered the old man's face. "You'll have plenty of money as soon as I get to be an aviator."

The two old folks stared at this.

"An aviator!" exclaimed Eben.

"Oh, dear, then you're sure to be killed!" wailed Charity. "They all do, sooner or later."

"Not these days," replied Ted confidently. "They've got the planes so perfect now that there aren't nearly so many accidents as there used to be."

"All the same, I notice that the insurance companies ain't keen about taking risks on those fellers," remarked Eben dryly. "But what's put the idea into your head? You haven't said anything to us about it."

"No, but I've been doing a heap of thinking," replied Ted. "And what I've seen to-day at the flying field has put the capsheaf on it. It's great fun, and there's lots of money in it. It's about the only profession that isn't overcrowded these days," he added, with a smile.

"It's always seemed to me like goin' in the face of Providence," said Charity. "The Lord gave us legs to walk on, an' if He'd wanted us to fly, He'd have given us wings."

"How are you going to learn?" asked Eben.

"Got to go to school somewhere, pass examinations and get a license, haven't you?"

"I suppose so," replied Ted, his face falling a little, for he had as yet given little thought to that question. "But remember that I'm working on planes now, that I know almost everything about them and the motors that work them, and I'll be able to get through my studies in a jiffy. I'll have a big advantage over most of the fellows that start in."

The thought of the flying school, however, kept Ted awake a good part of that night. He might have to go away from Bromville for a considerable period of time. That would mean that he would be earning nothing. And more than that, there would be the expenses of his keep and tuition while he was learning. Where was he to get the money? What would the old folks do without his wages?

Most of his money had been given to Eben every Saturday night. He had not been able to accumulate anything. At the present moment, he reflected bitterly, his cash capital was a dollar and twenty-seven cents.

Still some way, somehow, he must learn to fly. He *would* learn! And with this determination in his mind he finally fell asleep.

The next day at the noon hour he approached the foreman of his department.

"Can you give me a minute, Mr. Ellison?" he asked.

Big Bill Ellison grinned.

"Sure I can," he said genially. "I can give more than a minute to the fellow that took the wind out of the sails of them Gale ginks. Gee, that does me good every time I think of it! Shoot, Ted."

"It's this way," began Ted, a little diffidently. "I want to be an aviator."

Big Bill looked at him thoughtfully.

"Got the flying bug, have you?" he asked, as his eyes ran over Ted's lithe, muscular form.

"Just that," admitted Ted. "I've had the idea in my mind more or less for some time. But what I saw yesterday clinched things for me. To fly is what I want more than anything else in the world."

"And you won't be happy till you get it," smiled Ellison. "Well, this is a free country, and I like your ambition. I'd be awfully sorry to lose you at the works here, though. You've got the makings in you of a mighty good airplane mechanic."

"That's good of you to say so," said Ted, with a flush of gratification. "The question is whether I've got the makings of an airman."

Big Bill considered the question.

"Offhand, I should say yes," he answered slowly. "You've got the build, you've got the muscle, you've got the nerve. They'll carry you a good way. But there's more than that to flying. Your heart action, your sense of bal-

ance, the perfect coordination between mind and muscle and a lot of things like that. Not one man in a hundred, perhaps in a thousand, has the qualities that make up a good aviator. You won't know whether you have them all till they put you through a course of sprouts. But I can get a little bit of dope on it right now. Ever been up in an airplane?"

"No," replied Ted. "But I'm crazy to."

"Mustn't let you stay crazy," grinned Bill. "Tom," he called to a man in an aviator's suit who happened to be passing by, "when are you going to try out that new plane?"

"As soon as I get my lunch," replied Tom Maltby.

"Take Ted up with you," directed Bill.

"Sure thing," replied Tom good-naturedly. "Be ready in about an hour, Ted."

CHAPTER V

Flying High

It seemed to Ted Scott that his heart turned over in his body at the thought of going up in an airplane. Surprise and delight took his breath away.

"Do you really mean it?" he asked, turning to Ellison, his face aglow.

"Sure, I mean it," replied big Bill. "Now trot along and get your lunch. And don't be late in getting back, for Tom doesn't like to be kept waiting."

"I'll be here," promised Ted, still scarcely knowing whether he was standing on his head or his heels. "And thank you very much, Mr. Ellison. I feel happier than if you'd given me a thousand dollars."

"I'd rather have the thousand for mine," grinned Bill. "But there's no accounting for tastes. Good luck to you!"

Ted hastened over to the Bromville House as though on wings. His first impulse was to tell the old couple all about it. Then he reflected

that, if he did so, Charity's gentle heart would be oppressed with worry all the time that he was gone. Eben, too, would be anxious. They had enough to worry about now without his adding to their load even by so much as a feather. When he came back safe and sound would be time enough to talk about it.

"You're not eatin' enough to keep a bird alive," said Charity, as she noticed that he scarcely touched the food before him. "I hope you ain't comin' down with anything."

"Not a bit, Mother," replied Ted, putting an affectionate hand on the old lady's arm. "Never felt better in my life. But I ate such a big breakfast that I don't seem to care for much now. Besides, I have to get back to the works in a hurry."

He rose from the table, kissed her, and made quick time back to the works.

"You got back in a hurry," commented Tom, who was going about his plane tuning it up, testing the motor and making sure that all was ready for the flight.

"Yes," said Ted breathlessly. "I didn't spend much time over lunch."

"Just as well," remarked Tom. "Us fliers are something like the op'ry singers—don't overload our stomachs when we've got work to do. Plenty of time to eat when we get back. You'll find an extra suit of mine over there," he continued, pointing to an aviator's costume

thrown carelessly over a box. "It's probably a little too big for you, but it will do in a pinch."

Ted made haste to get into the flying togs, and when he was fully equipped he felt more than ever like a real aviator. It was all he could do to keep from strutting.

Tom had been watching him amusedly from a corner of his eye.

"Look like the real goods," he grinned.

"As far as the clothes go, yes," laughed Ted. "It remains to be seen what's inside the clothes. I've read of the donkey in the lion's skin. Maybe that's what I'll turn out to be."

Tom laughed with him.

"I'll bank on you," he said. "I've been watchin' you a long time, and many's the time I've said to myself 'there's good flyin' material goin' to waste.' "

"I'm glad you feel that way about it," returned Ted, highly gratified. "I only hope I don't disappoint you."

A number of the men of the plant had come to see Maltby start on his test of the new biplane. Among them were several of Ted's special friends. He had had no time to tell them of his intended trip, and as his back happened to be toward them they did not recognize him at once in his flying togs.

"Who's the fellow that's going up with you, Tom?" asked Mark Lawson.

"Take a look at him," grinned Tom. "You've seen him many a time before."

Ted turned about just then, and there was a murmur of astonishment as his chums recognized him.

"Ted Scott!" exclaimed Mark. "So you're going up with Tom, are you? Why didn't you tell a fellow?"

"Didn't have a chance to," replied Ted. "I didn't know it myself until an hour ago."

"Ted Scott, the Demon Aviator!" grinned Breck Lewis.

"Won't speak to us poor dubs after this," laughed Jack Forrest.

"Have you made your will?" asked Mark.

"Just a dollar and twenty-seven cents to leave," grinned Ted. "You fellows can divide it among you."

"Climb in now," directed Tom, who had finished his examination of the machine.

Ted did as commanded and took one of the seats in the fuselage. Tom got in after him, saw that the straps that bound them both to their seats were secure, and gave the word for the blocks to be knocked away from in front of the machine.

With a roar the motor started working and the plane moved along the runway, gathering speed with every moment.

When within two hundred yards of the runway's end Tom lifted it into the air, and they

were off on their aerial flight, ascending at an angle that soon had them up to a height of a thousand feet.

There had been an involuntary catching of his breath as Ted found himself soaring into the air. Then every other feeling was merged in the delight of feeling that he was really up in the airship. The first step in realizing his ambition had been achieved. He was actually flying!

Ted Scott knew instinctively that he had found his real vocation. There was not the slightest sense of fear. He looked down at the earth, now nearly two thousand feet below him, for Tom had been ascending rapidly. The town below him seemed merely a dot. The Rappock River was only a silver thread. The figures of men could not be distinguished at all.

Yet, though he knew that a fall from that dizzy height would mean instant death, he had no physical qualm, no dizziness, no apprehension whatever. He knew that he was in his natural element. It seemed as if all his previous life had been leading up to that supreme moment.

Conversation was practically impossible because of the roar of the motor, which was like thunder in their ears. Besides, Tom had warned him against talking. He wanted no distraction from his important work of trying out this new plane.

They were above the clouds now. The earth had vanished from sight. They were alone in the universe, lost in immensity. There was nothing between them and the sun that bathed the plane in splendor. Ted felt that he had been transported into a new world.

There was little sensation of motion. It was as though they were floating, cradled in the ether. Yet a glance at the board in front of him showed that they were making over a hundred miles an hour.

He stole a glance at the silent man beside him. Tom's face was strained and earnest. His eyes were studying the bewildering number of instruments in front of him, those indicating height, speed, direction, barometric pressure and a host of other details. To the pilot they were an open book, and each had to be considered in relation to all others. Ted had a glimpse of the knowledge he would have to acquire to take his place in the ranks of the aviators. It was a brave man's job!

Then came a sudden change, as Tom, evidently pleased at the behavior of the plane in straight flying, began to put it through a series of stunts. He went into nose spins, tail spins, falling leaves, and loop the loops. It was a breath-taking exhibition, and at times showed what might be regarded as a reckless levity, an unwarranted taking of chances.

But Ted knew better. He knew that what

were called "stunts" and had often aroused the criticism of those who did not understand were positively essential to an aviator's training. Not one of those daring things that seemed so "freakish" but what might be absolutely necessary at times under certain conditions of wind or weather or warfare. And a first-class aviator must be ready to do them all, if circumstances demanded.

For perhaps three hours the tests continued. Then at last Tom Maltby turned the nose of the plane toward home, and they soon found themselves over Bromville. In a series of long, swooping curves, Tom descended toward the field attached to the plant, made a graceful landing that would scarcely have broken a pane of glass, and gradually brought the plane to a stop.

The coming of the plane had been noted from afar, and big Bill Ellison was anxiously waiting for it, with quite a number of other pilots and mechanics. They had helped make that plane and were keenly interested in its performance.

"How did she work, Tom?" was Ellison's first question, as Maltby and Ted released themselves from the straps and jumped down to the ground.

"As well as any plane I ever handled on its first test," responded Maltby. "A little stiff, of course, but that will wear off. She's going

to be a sweet flyer, if I'm any judge. One slight change in the angles of her wings, and she'll be as near perfect as a plane can be. She's a credit to the plant."

"So here you are," welcomed Mark, as he clapped Ted on the shoulder. "I feel better now than I did when I saw you go up, I can tell you."

"He's been nearer heaven than he's ever been before," grinned Breck Lewis.

"And that dollar and twenty-seven cents we were counting on is all shot to pieces," mourned Jack Forrest.

"Too bad," laughed Ted, as he stamped his feet to get the cramp out of his limbs. "I tell you, fellows, it was great! I've never known anything like it in my life."

"All the same, I'll bet there were times when you would have changed with us, if you could," volunteered Mark.

"You lose your bet," replied Ted. "I wish the trip had lasted twice as long. But I'll be up again the first time I get a chance."

"What a glutton the boy is," laughed Mark.

In the meantime Tom Maltby and Bill Ellison were walking over to the plant.

"How about Ted?" asked Ellison, curiously. "Was he there with the pluck?"

"Bet your life he was!" replied Tom emphatically. "That lad doesn't know what it is to be afraid. I hadn't told him about the stunts

I was going to do before I went up, for I wanted to see how he'd act when taken by surprise. I put the old bus through everything I knew, and I kept watching the boy out of the corner of my eye. Did he show the white feather? He did not! Nothing fazed him, not a little bit. I tell you, Bill, he's a born flyer."

"Your judgment's ace high with me, Tom," responded Bill. "It just confirms what I've been thinking for some time past. I didn't like to suggest it to the lad, because it's a big responsibility to take in case anything happened to him. But when he himself spoke of it I was glad to give him the chance."

Ted put the rest of the afternoon in at the works, but, though he kept strictly to his job, he could not prevent his mind wandering at times to his thrilling experience of the afternoon. He felt like some Columbus who had discovered an uncharted world. The earth seemed humdrum after his flight into the sky.

He was still tingling with the stir of it when the whistle blew and he wended his way toward home, eager, yet hesitating nevertheless, to tell the old people of his adventure.

"S'pose you're tired, dear boy, after your hard day's work," said Charity, as the three sat down to the little table in a small room adjoining the hotel dining room.

"Not a bit," returned Ted, as he fell to with relish on the homely but well-cooked and abun-

dant meal. "In fact, I've been sitting still a good deal of the time."

"Sitting still," repeated Eben. "I didn't know they paid any of the hands wages for that."

"Sounds as if you'd been havin' your picture took," observed Charity, as she poured the coffee.

"Nothing like that," laughed Ted. "I was sitting still in an airplane."

"Fixin' some of the inner parts, I s'pose," said Eben.

"Wrong again," laughed Ted. "The airplane was a mile high in the sky."

There was a gasp of mingled surprise and terror from his foster parents.

CHAPTER VI

A New Friend

The old couple could scarcely have been more terrified by the explosion of a bombshell. Ted Scott had become very dear to them, the delight of their old age, and any menace to his safety seemed more than they could bear.

"Oh, how could you have taken such a chance?" gasped Charity.

"It sure was a big risk," said Eben gravely.

"You might have been killed!" wailed Charity.

"Well, you see I wasn't," returned Ted. "I'm sitting here at the table just as I was at noon. Remember that flying isn't what it used to be. They've got the plane to-day almost as perfect as the automobile. You wouldn't have been scared if I had told you that I had been on an auto ride."

"Oh, but that's different!" exclaimed Charity.

In his heart of hearts Ted knew that she was right. It was true that many of the old dan-

gers had been eliminated by the progress of science. Yet flying had a host of perils that might daunt the bravest. Man was a long way yet from the conquest of the air. Scarcely a day passed without the death of one more airman being reported.

But pioneering always left in its wake a trail of the dead. Flying was no exception. No progress has ever been made except at the sacrifice of brave spirits. If no one took chances, no one would ever do anything. And Ted was willing to be one of those who took chances.

Still, he did all he could to quiet the fears of the old couple. He cited Tom Maltby himself, who, for years, had pursued his calling and never had a scratch. There, too, were hosts of others who had taken innumerable risks and come through unscathed. Why should not he, Ted Scott, have equal luck?

To an extent he quelled the agitation of his foster parents, though he knew he left them far from convinced. In the end he gained a reluctant consent to go up again if opportunity offered, though they devoutly hoped that the opportunity would be long in coming.

When he went to his room that night he took with him an aviation magazine that he had secured from the technical library at the plant. He pored eagerly over the advertisements of flying schools, a course in one of which would qualify him for a Federal pilot's license.

As he read his heart sank to zero!

How could he, who had a dollar and twenty-seven cents in his pocket, hope to obtain the money for such a course? Twenty dollars an hour for instruction, twenty-five dollars, thirty dollars, as the various prices ran.

"Thirty dollars an hour!" he muttered sadly to himself. "More than I make in a whole week!"

He figured that, even on the most limited schedule by which he could hope to obtain any kind of proficiency, he would need at least three hundred and fifty or four hundred dollars. And that did not include his board, which would have to be additional.

If he had been wholly alone, he could, in the course of time, save enough from his wages. But, as has been said, practically every dollar of his earnings was needed by Eben and Charity to keep their heads above water. He was of late their main support, and he would not, could not fail them.

He thought bitterly of Brewster Gale, now rolling in luxury, the swindler who had defrauded Eben of his property. If it had not been for him, Eben and Charity would have plenty of money and Ted's course would have been clear before him.

He pondered the matter until his head as well as his heart ached, and at last fell asleep with no solution in sight.

About the middle of the next morning, Ted was busy at his work in the plant, when he noted a stranger talking to big Bill Ellison at a bench not far from his own.

"My name is Hapworth—Walter Hapworth," Ted heard the stranger say. "I am staying at the Hotel Excelsior and am taking part in the present golf tournament. I have nothing on this morning, and thought that, if you had no objection, I would like to look through your works."

"Glad to oblige you, Mr. Hapworth," said Bill heartily, as he took the proffered hand. "We're rather proud of this plant of ours and are always ready to show visitors around. Are you especially interested in flying, Mr. Hapworth?"

"As a spectator, yes," replied Mr. Hapworth, with a smile. "I haven't done any flying myself. But that flying circus rather got me going, and I may take a hack at it. I've tried almost everything else, and a new thrill wouldn't be unwelcome."

"There'd be plenty of thrills," laughed Ellison. "Let me see, who'll I send around with you?"

His eyes fell on Ted, whom he indicated to the visitor.

"I'll let him see you through," he said.

Mr. Hapworth coughed.

"Isn't he a bit young?" he asked deprecat-

ingly. "There may be things I want to know about that he won't be able to tell me."

Ellison laughed.

"Don't worry about that for a minute," he said. "If you can ask that lad anything about planes that he doesn't know, it's more than I can do. Ted!"

"Yes, Mr. Ellison," replied Ted, dropping his task and coming up to where the two were standing.

"I want to introduce you to Mr. Hapworth, Ted," said Bill. "Mr. Hapworth, this is Ted Scott." They shook hands. "I was telling Mr. Hapworth, Ted, that you'd show him around the works. Take him through the different departments and let him see what a really big thing the Devally-Hipson works are."

"I'll be glad to," replied Ted, who had taken an instant liking to the young man with a tall, muscular frame, good features, aquiline nose and pleasant gray eyes. His clothes and manners showed that he was of the socially elect, but Ted remarked that there was nothing of the snob about him and voted him in his own mind a "regular fellow."

"This way, Mr. Hapworth," said Ted, and led him into the section where planes were being assembled.

There was a bewildering variety, and the visitor's eyes lighted with interest.

"I didn't know but what you concentrated on

some special type of plane," Mr. Hapworth remarked.

"No," said Ted, with a touch of pride in his voice. "We make about everything from the little plane that you could put in a garage to the big triplanes that can carry passengers and freight."

"A pretty wide garage that could accommodate a plane with its broad wings," remarked the visitor, with a smile.

"The wings fold up," Ted explained. "It really doesn't take up any more room than an automobile."

"Just trundle it out in the morning and go for a spin," laughed Mr. Hapworth.

"Something like that," agreed Ted. "Only of course every home hasn't a runway attached. But when the helicopter principle is perfected, one will be able to get along without a runway."

"Helicopter?" said the visitor, in a tone of inquiry.

"Yes," replied Ted. "It's a device by which the plane will be able to rise straight up from the ground without a preliminary run. It's been done to some degree in experiments, but it hasn't got to the practical stage yet. It's bound to, though, in time, for there's no scientific reason why it shouldn't."

In the motor department they paused before a new type that was running with a smooth,

gentle hum that was music to the practiced ear of a mechanic.

"Water-cooled, I suppose, like most of our automobile engines," observed Mr. Hapworth.

"No," replied Ted, "that kind is going out of date. It's cooled by air."

"Indeed," was the reply. "What is the special advantage of that?"

"Chiefly in the matter of weight," explained Ted. "The idea in an airplane is to get rid of every bit of needless weight you can. Water weighs a good deal more than air. Then, too, you can always get air, but water may be scarce, as when perhaps you're flying across a desert. Your supply is bound sooner or later to evaporate, and then you're in a fix, if you can't replenish it."

In the parachute department, Mr. Hapworth picked up a piece of cloth and ran it through his fingers.

"Seems to be a sort of silk," he remarked.

"That's what it is," replied Ted. "It is called basket weave silk. They used to employ Japanese habutai silk for parachutes, but they're convinced now that the basket weave is the best."

"On what grounds?" asked the visitor with interest.

"Well, one reason is that a parachute of basket weave has less oscillation than the habutai type," answered Ted. "Another is that

it absorbs the shock better on opening. Then, too, it decreases the danger from sprains and bruises in landing, for it allows for a slower descent. One of our fellows who tried it a little while ago said he was scarcely conscious that he was moving."

All over the plant they went, and not a question did the visitor ask that was not promptly and intelligently answered by Ted.

"Why, you're a regular encyclopedia on the making of airplanes!" exclaimed Mr. Hapworth, as they were on their way back to the foreman. "Where on earth did you pick all of it up?"

"Oh, there are lots of things I have to learn yet, ' replied Ted modestly. "But I keep my eyes and ears open and I do a lot of studying at home."

"Have you ever been up in a plane yourself?" asked Hapworth.

"I went up yesterday for the first time," answered Ted excitedly. "I tell you it was a great experience!"

"Weren't you scared?" came the question.

"No," answered Ted simply. "I was so interested in the trip that I didn't have time to get scared."

Mr. Hapworth laughed.

"That's a new definition of bravery," he chuckled. " 'Didn't have time to get scared.' My boy, you're the stuff of which airmen are

made. Ever think of taking up flying as a profession?"

"Yes," replied Ted. "As soon as I can get money enough together to go to a flying school," he added. "There's nothing on earth I'd rather do than fly."

Mr. Hapworth considered him for a moment. He seemed about to say something, but checked himself.

"I'd like to see more of you if you care to let me," he went on after a moment's pause. "I want to thank you very much for your courtesy in showing me round. I'd like to show my appreciation in some way. By the way, have you ever seen a golf tournament?"

"No," replied Ted; "but I've often thought I'd like to. They say it's a great game."

"It is," assented Mr. Hapworth, with enthusiasm.

He took his personal card from his pocket and scribbled a few words upon it.

"Show this to the gate keeper at the golf grounds," he said, as he handed the card to Ted, "and he'll pass you in. I suppose you have Saturday afternoon off?"

"Yes," replied Ted, as he accepted with thanks the proffered card. "The works close at twelve."

"Come up then, if you can," urged Mr. Hapworth. "It will be a big day on the course. I'm on for a game myself that afternoon. After

the game I wish you'd hunt me up at the Hotel Excelsior. I want to have a talk with you."

"I'll be glad to," replied Ted, as he surrendered his charge to Mr. Ellison, and with a word of farewell went back to his bench.

"Well, Mr. Hapworth, how did you like our plant?" asked big Bill genially.

"It's immense," replied the visitor. "I had had no idea it was so big or so interesting. And that boy you gave me as a guide is great. Understands everything from A to Z and is able to tell what he knows."

"Ted's all right," responded Ellison emphatically. "We think a lot of him around here."

"I should think you would," was the reply. "He seems to be one young fellow in a thousand. I understand that he has ambitions to become a flyer."

"Yes. And, if he does, he'll be a crackerjack, or I miss my guess," answered Ellison. "Too bad that he hasn't the money to go to a flying school."

"He has no means, then?" asked Hapworth.

"Not a dollar behind him," replied big Bill. "He makes good wages for a lad, but he's practically supporting the old folks that adopted him and who have lately fallen upon hard times and I guess it takes every penny he earns. Too

bad, too, for give the boy half a chance and he'd go far."

"He shall have his chance," murmured Hapworth to himself.

"What's that?" asked Ellison, who had not caught the words distinctly.

"Nothing," replied Hapworth absently.

CHAPTER VII

Discomfited Bullies

The golf course had a large attendance on the Saturday afternoon that Ted, armed with Mr. Hapworth's card, passed through the gate. Not only the guests of the Hotel Excelsior were there in a body, but a host of visitors had come from all over that region.

For it was a club championship that was at stake that afternoon, and the contestants, by the elimination games of the previous days, had narrowed down to Ransom, the present holder of the title, and Mr. Hapworth, the contender.

Ted was in the gallery that followed the game from hole to hole, and it need not be said that he was enthusiastically rooting for Mr. Hapworth. He liked him thoroughly and was full of hope that he would win.

Win he did after a grueling struggle, with the result in doubt up to the last hole, when a superb putt by Hapworth decided the game.

After the cheering had died away, there were speeches by some of the committee in charge

and the presentation of the trophy to the new champion. In the crowd that surrounded the stand, Hapworth had not noticed Ted, but the latter remembered his promise to look his new friend up after the game and waited about until he thought that Mr. Hapworth had had time to take his shower and slip into his customary clothes.

To kill time, Ted strolled about the links and took in with wondering eyes the superb character of the course, with its sward gleaming like green velvet beneath the slanting rays of the late afternoon sun. He could readily believe what he had read in the papers, that it was not exceeded by anything in the State.

But Ted's enjoyment of its beauty was marred by the intruding thought that this property should of right be Eben Browning's. He had owned every foot of it, and had been swindled out of it by the conscienceless trickster who posed as its present owner. If Eben had it now, how easy it would be for Ted to fulfil his consuming ambition! The flying course would no longer be a problem.

But there was no use in harboring gloomy thoughts, and when he thought that Mr. Hapworth would probably be ready to receive him Ted made his way toward the Hotel Excelsior, whose broad verandas were thronged with gay and laughing groups.

As he approached the steps of the main en-

trance, he met Greg and Duck Gale descending them. Their eyes lighted on him in a glance of savage recognition.

"Look who's here!" sneered Greg.

"The guardian of the planes that nearly came in for a licking the other day," jeered Duck.

"Look here, what are you doing on these grounds, anyway?" demanded Greg truculently.

"That is not your business," returned Ted composedly.

"I'll mighty soon make it my business," growled Greg. "This is no place for fellows like you."

"Throw him off the grounds," suggested Duck.

"You'll find it a pretty big contract," retorted Ted, whose anger was beginning to rise, though he strove to hold it in check.

"These cheap skates ought to be taught to know their places," snarled Greg.

Ted clenched his fists. He saw red, and there is no knowing what might have happened had not a voice come from the top of the steps.

"Why, here you are now, Scott!" exclaimed Walter Hapworth, as he came hastily down the steps and grasped Ted's hand warmly. "I've been looking all over for you. I was afraid you'd passed up my invitation."

The cordiality in his tone and handclasp was balm to Ted's sore spirit.

"No danger of that, Mr. Hapworth," he responded. "I've been counting on it ever since I saw you at the works."

"Come right up and we'll find a cozy corner for a chat," said Mr. Hapworth. "And I want you to be my guest at dinner."

The sudden change that had come over Greg and Duck during this brief colloquy was ludicrous. All their brag and bluster had passed away. They looked at each other sheepishly.

So this young fellow whom they looked down upon so contemptuously because of his lack of money was the invited guest of Walter Hapworth, the millionaire, the golf champion, at the moment the most prominent guest of the Hotel Excelsior! They were abashed and dumbfounded.

"Gee, but we came near making an awful break!" muttered Greg, as he watched the retreating figures.

"Dad would have hit the ceiling if we'd done anything to make Mr. Hapworth sore," mumbled Duck.

In the meantime, Mr. Hapworth and Ted had threaded their way through the throng on the veranda toward a retired section. They had nearly reached it when Ted caught sight of Mr. Monet. A look of pleased recognition came in

the latter's eyes, and he hurried forward, hand outstretched.

"My brave young friend!" he exclaimed, as he clasped Ted's hand. "It is a pleasure of the greatest to see you again."

"And I'm glad to see you," returned Ted warmly.

"So you are a friend of Mr. Hapworth's, I see," said Mr. Monet, noticing that the two were together. "Mr. Hapworth and I already know each other. We are old friends. But I hope you have come to-night to accept my invitation to dinner."

"I saw him first," put in Mr. Hapworth, with a smile. "Suppose we make it a threesome."

"That will be fine," was the answer. "But I still hope to have Mr. Scott as my guest at a later time."

"You referred to him as your 'brave' young friend," put in Walter Hapworth. "Is that because of the trip he took in the airplane the other day?"

"Not at all," replied Mr. Monet. "I was referring to the time he saved my life on the day of the flying circus. You remember I was telling you about it."

"So this was the young man, was it?" asked Mr. Hapworth, regarding Ted with an added interest. "Well, I should say offhand that that's just what he'd be likely to do."

The three sat down together in a secluded

portion of the veranda and chatted for a while on various subjects. Naturally the golf tournament came in for considerable discussion.

"I'm so glad you won, Mr. Hapworth," said Ted. "I was rooting for you all through the game. That winning putt at the last hole was a wonder."

"Luck played a part there," said Hapworth, with a smile. "Did you see how the ball hesitated on the very edge of the hole? It didn't seem as if it knew whether it ought to go in the hole or not. I tell you my heart was in my mouth."

"It must be a great strain to go through a game like that, with the championship depending on it," observed Ted.

"It is," admitted Mr. Hapworth. "And I'm free to say that I'm glad it's over. But now I'm hungry. Let's go in to dinner."

Ted had never dined so sumptuously as he did that night. The damask napery, the crystal and the silver and the flowers, the shaded lights and the choice food, elaborately served by soft-footed waiters, were a revelation. If he felt any nervousness about the correct use of the various forks, he did not betray it, and his considerate friends made every effort to make him feel at home. When they came to the coffee Mr. Hapworth introduced the subject of which he had been thinking considerably of late.

"I'm afraid, Ted—you don't mind if I use your first name, do you?—that you would have blushed, if you had heard all that Mr. Ellison said about you the other morning."

"I guess Mr. Ellison thinks a good deal more of me than I'm worth," disclaimed Ted. "He's been an awfully good friend to me."

"I don't think he exaggerated," returned his host. "But let that go. He said that you were thinking of taking up flying, and if you did, he thought you'd be a crackajack. Now, suppose you had definitely made up your mind to go in for aviation, what would be the first step you'd have to take?"

"Go to a flying school," replied Ted. "You get a training there you can't get anywhere else, and if you pass the tests all right you're qualified to apply for a Federal pilot's license."

"And after that?" queried Mr. Hapworth.

"Then it would just be a matter of getting a job," was the answer. "One might become an Air Mail pilot, go into the Army or Navy service, or into commercial work. There are far more good jobs than there are good aviators. Then, too, there are any number of chances to compete for the big purses that are offered in competitions of one kind or another."

"I see," returned Mr. Hapworth. "Now about the flying school. How much would it cost to go through that?"

"Some charge more than others," replied

Ted, "but a fair average cost would be about four hundred dollars, and the cost of a fellow's board and room might be about two hundred more."

"About six hundred dollars altogether," summed up his host.

"That ought to cover it," responded Ted.

There was silence for a moment. Mr. Hapworth seemed as if he wanted to say something, but did not exactly know how to go about it. At last he cleared his throat and bent over the table.

"Now, Ted," he said, "I want you to believe that I'm your friend and that I wouldn't pry into your private affairs for the world if I didn't have a good reason for doing so. You won't be offended if I ask you a personal question or two, will you?"

"Certainly not," answered Ted, wondering what on earth Mr. Hapworth was driving at. "I'd know that you only asked them out of kindness."

"And in that you'd be dead right, if you'll add out of friendship," replied his host. "Well, here goes. Have you any money saved up that would help you through the training school?"

"No, Mr. Hapworth, I haven't," admitted Ted. "I suppose I ought to be ashamed to say so, but—"

"I know just what that 'but' means," re-

turned Mr. Hapworth, "and it does you credit. Mr. Ellison told me that you gave practically all your earnings to the old folks you live with and who have brought you up."

"Yes," replied Ted. "Not that I grudge it in the least. They've been awfully good to me, and I can never repay them for their kindness. And it isn't as if it was their fault. They're doing the very best they can. They're keeping the hotel, the old Bromville House, and they used to do a good business. But the hotel is behind the times now, and they have all they can do to make ends meet. Usually they can't do that, and my wages help make up the deficiency."

"I see," said Mr. Hapworth sympathetically. "And that, by the way, is another item that would have to be taken into account, if you went to the flying school. You not only would have to have enough to pay for your tuition and personal expenses, but the old folks would have to have something equivalent to your weekly wage while you were away. Then, too, after you have finished the course of instruction, it might be some little time before you could get a job that suited you."

"You've got it right," agreed Ted, a little sadly. "I'll just have to keep on working until somehow I can get hold of it. Perhaps business will pick up at the old hotel. And likely enough

I'll soon get a raise in wages. At any rate, just now it's out of the question."

Mr. Hapworth had been doing a little figuring on the back of the menu card.

"All told, a thousand dollars ought to cover everything," he murmured. "Don't you think so, Ted?"

"More than cover it," replied Ted.

"All right," said his host, drawing a checkbook and a fountain pen from his pocket. "You're going to have that thousand!"

CHAPTER VIII

The Aviation School

Ted Scott's head was in a whirl as he heard Mr. Hapworth's words and noted his action.

"What—what's that?" he stammered, half rising to his feet.

"I say you're going to have that thousand dollars," replied the young millionaire, with a whimsical smile.

"But—but—" persisted Ted bewilderedly. "I didn't know—I can't take your money! You don't know me! I haven't any claim on you! No—no—I can't!"

"Now, look here, Ted," protested Mr. Hapworth. "Be sensible. You need this money and can make the best use of it. I've got more than I know what to do with. I want to do this more than I've wanted to do anything for a long time. Why should you deprive me of that pleasure?"

"It's mighty good of you to put it that way," said Ted, with deep feeling. "All the same, I don't feel that you ought to do it or

that I ought to take it. I'm almost a stranger. You've only seen me once before to-day. You don't know anything about me."

"I know a winner when I see one," returned Mr. Hapworth, "and I want to do something worth while with my money. I want to stake you to that flying course. The money means absolutely nothing to me. It means a lot to you. Let me put it to a good use."

"What Mr. Hapworth says is of the most sensible, *mon ami,*" interposed Mr. Monet, who had been listening to the colloquy with profound interest. "The only change I would suggest is that he permit me to share in his pleasure, he to put in five hundred and I the other five hundred. Is it not so?"

"As you like," assented Walter Hapworth with a bow. "I don't want to be selfish."

"Selfish!" exclaimed Ted, feeling the moisture come to his eyes at the generosity and delicacy of these two good friends of his. "You are both the soul of kindness! But I've done nothing to deserve it."

"Nothing but to save my life the other day," replied Mr. Monet quietly.

"Nothing but give me new faith in the young fellows of this generation," added Mr. Hapworth. "Now look here, Ted. This thing has been done a thousand times. Look at the prospectors in the West who could have done nothing without a stake, but with it have been able

to discover gold mines. Look at the struggling business men who have become rich after they've once got a start. The men who gave them that start simply gambled that they would make good. Now I—or rather Mr. Monet and I, if he will have it that way—want to take a gamble on your courage and ability. We both believe that it's a mighty good bet."

Mr. Monet nodded emphatic approval.

"But—but you have no assurance that I will make good," replied Ted. "I may be a flivver when it comes to real flying. There are so many qualifications required of an aviator that I may fail in some of the tests. Then your money would be wasted."

"I'll take a chance on that," returned Hapworth.

"And I also," added Mr. Monet.

Ted was profoundly touched.

"I—I'm all upset," he murmured. "You both are good beyond words. This has come to me so suddenly that my head's in a whirl. I'd like to talk it over with my foster parents if you don't mind. I feel that I owe them that."

"That's all right," agreed Mr. Hapworth. "They should, as you say, be consulted about it. I hope they'll come to our way of looking at it. Suppose you drop over a couple of nights from now and let us have your decision."

"And this time you are both to be my guests at dinner," put in Mr. Monet.

Ted eagerly agreed to this, and for the time the subject was dropped. They sat chatting for some time, sipping their coffee and listening to the band, and then Ted, with reiterated thanks, left his warm-hearted friends and made his way home.

At a table near the one at which they had been sitting, but hidden from them by a group of palms, two young men sat looking at each other.

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked Greg Gale of his brother Duck.

"Fools and their money are soon parted," snapped Duck, as he dabbed the ashes from a cigarette into a receiver.

"That fellow a flyer!" snorted Greg, in a tone which he tried to make as contemptuous as possible.

"He'll go up like a rocket and come down like a stick," prophesied Duck.

"Suppose he should make good, though, and become one of the big flyers," suggested Greg, showing by the way he spoke how distasteful the possibility was to him. "I suppose Bromville would go crazy over him. Think of that cheap skate lording it over everybody!"

"I hope he breaks his neck," snarled Duck. "Why has Hapworth butted into this, any-

way? Why doesn't he mind his own business?"

"Not quite so loud, Duck," cautioned Greg. "Remember he's put a pot of money into the golf course, and Dad wants to keep on the right side of him."

Ted Scott in the meantime had wended his way toward home as though he were in a dream. He had at times to pinch himself to make sure that it was all real. His whole outlook on the future had been changed by the unexpected offer that had come to him. What had seemed so hopeless a little while ago was now clearly within his reach.

Upon one thing he was determined. If he accepted the money at all, it would be as a loan instead of a gift. He would work like a slave to pay the money back. He knew that his generous friends would not care a particle if he never repaid them. But that made no difference to him. He had his own self-respect to consider.

He found Eben and Charity sitting on the veranda. He threw himself down on the top step close to them and greeted them affectionately.

"We was a mite worried when you didn't come home to dinner," said Charity.

"Thought maybe a rush order had come into the works and you'd had to work overtime," remarked Eben.

"No, it wasn't that," replied Ted, as he

wiped his brow, for the night was warm and he had been hurrying. "I've had dinner at the Hotel Excelsior."

The old folks straightened up and gasped.

"The Hotel Excelsior!" exclaimed Eben.

"S'pose it was a mighty lot better eatin' than you get at home," sighed Charity.

"Don't you believe it," denied Ted stoutly. "Of course there were a lot of new-fangled dishes with French names. But there's no cooking anywhere that's as good as yours, Mother."

"How came it you was there?" asked Eben. "Dinner must have cost you a lot of money."

"Not a cent," replied Ted. "I took dinner by invitation with Mr. Hapworth. You know, the man that came to the works the other morning that I was telling you about. He's a prince, I can tell you!"

"No better than my boy," said Charity jealously.

"Well, he's got a lot more money, anyway," laughed Ted. "I met that Mr. Monet, too, the one I pulled out of the way of the airplane on the runway. And what do you think they said to me? Give you three guesses."

"I never was much good at riddles," smiled Eben.

"Don't keep us waiting, Ted," pleaded Charity. "What did they have to say?"

"Offered me a thousand dollars," replied Ted.

If he had counted on creating a sensation, he was gratified. Eben almost fell out of his chair, and Charity raised her hands in wonder.

"A thousand dollars!" they cried in unison.

"You're gittin' us on a string," said Eben rather reproachfully.

"Nary a string!" replied Ted, laughing, and then he went on to tell them of the generous proposition that had been made to him.

"Of course," he concluded, "I wouldn't take it as a gift, but I thought it might be all right as a loan. But I told them I'd talk it over with you first and see what you thought of it."

What they thought of it, as soon as they had recovered from their surprise, was chiefly negative. Both had the instinctive dread of flying common to the older generation. They peopled the thought with grisly images of disaster. And both of them worshiped Ted, cherished him as the apple of their eye.

Eben was the first to yield to Ted's earnest pleadings. He had a broader outlook upon life, and, as a man himself, realized that risk attached to many of life's undertakings. He knew also that the greater the risk the greater would be the prizes that rewarded it.

Charity was the harder to convince. She was governed more by her emotions than her reason. She pictured Ted as dead, crippled, the victim of a host of calamities. She knew that she would be always battling with her fears.

But she saw how the boy's heart was set upon his project, and for his sake she at last reluctantly yielded.

"I s'pose, after all, the Lord is Lord of the sky as well as the earth," she observed, wiping her eyes with a corner of her apron, "an' I shall be prayin' day an' night that He'll have you in His holy keepin'."

"I know you will, Mother dear," said Ted, as he kissed her. "And with you praying I'm sure that nothing bad can happen to me."

The next morning he opened the subject to big Bill Ellison.

Bill listened with the keenest interest.

"Them fellers are all wool and a yard wide," he said, when Ted had finished. "I liked that young Hapworth from the time my eyes lighted on him."

"What do you think I ought to do, Mr. Ellison?" asked Ted.

"Do?" exclaimed Bill. "Snap up the offer as a trout gobbles a worm. It's the chance of a lifetime. I'd hate to lose you, but I'd hate myself if I stood in your way."

"Seems to me they're taking a mighty big gamble," observed Ted.

"No gamble at all, the way I look at it," returned Bill. "They're bettin' on a sure thing. Of course, there's nothin' sure in this world but death an' taxes, but to bet on you is like puttin' money in the bank."

Ted flushed at the unqualified statement.

"I'm afraid you're putting it too strongly," he protested.

"Not a bit," declared Bill. "Why, do you know what Tom Maltby said to me yesterday?"

"What?" asked Ted.

"He said to me," Bill told him: " 'Mark my words, Bill,' he said. 'That boy, Ted Scott, is a comer. We'll yet see him writin' his name across the sky'!"

CHAPTER IX

A Crooked Deal

"Writing his name across the sky!"

Would he ever attain such fame as that? Ted Scott wondered. The thought made him tingle to the finger tips.

All that day and the next he worked as in a daze. But it was a golden daze. Ambition was stirring him to the depths.

"Writing his name across the sky!"

Ted Scott had not forgotten that many folks in town looked at him as a "nobody." Many a time he had raged inwardly at this, but to no avail. He had tried in vain to trace his parentage, not once but many times. But the past was a locked book to him—not to be opened until many years later.

On the evening of the second day he kept his dinner appointment with Mr. Monet. Both he and Mr. Hapworth greeted him with cordiality, even with eagerness. It was apparent that their wish to "stake" him had increased rather than diminished.

But by tacit agreement nothing was said about the real object of Ted's coming until they had first eaten an excellent dinner. Then his host and Mr. Hapworth lighted their cigars and looked at him with a quizzical smile.

"How is it, *mon ami?*" asked his host. "Have your father and mother given their consent to our proposition?"

"Yes," replied Ted. "Though I had to fight hard to make them see things my way. I don't think my mother sees it that way yet," he added. "But at least she won't stand in my way."

"Ah, that is good!" replied Mr. Monet heartily.

"Then we can look upon the matter as settled," exulted Mr. Hapworth.

"If you and Mr. Monet still feel the same way about it, yes," replied Ted. "That is, if you'll let me take the money as a loan and pay you back when I can."

"Why, I guess there'll be no difficulty about that," said Mr. Hapworth with a smile, and Mr. Monet nodded approval. "We're both perfectly glad and willing to make it a gift outright and let it go at that. But if it will make you feel more comfortable to look on it as a loan, that, too, will be all right."

"If I live, I will pay it," declared Ted. "But here's another thing. Suppose anything should happen to me while I'm in training, die in a

crash or anything like that. You've got no security at all and you'd be out your money."

"We'd feel so bad about anything happening to you that we wouldn't give the money a second thought," affirmed Mr. Monet.

"All the same," replied Ted, "I think I ought to get my life insured in your favor for the thousand dollars and interest."

"Now, now, nothing like that," objected Mr. Hapworth. "In the first place, you'd find it rather hard to get insured, except at a ruinous premium. Flying isn't looked upon with favor by the life insurance companies. Then again, we wouldn't want any money that you had had to die for us to get."

"It's tremendously good and generous of you," said Ted fervently. "Even if I give you back the money, I'll still be in debt to you all my life."

"I've no doubt the day will come when you're famous that we'll feel in debt to you for having been permitted to help along the good work," declared Mr. Monet smilingly. "Now let us settle the whole thing right here, and then we'll forget about it."

He drew out his checkbook and made out a check to Ted's order for five hundred dollars. Mr. Hapworth followed with his check, and Ted thanked them in a voice that trembled with feeling and put the checks into his pocket.

One thousand dollars! To them it meant

simply the gratification of a kindly impulse. To him it meant the realization of the dream of his life!

To relieve him of any feeling of embarrassment, his generous friends turned the conversation to other topics.

"What do you think of this hotel, Ted?" asked Walter Hapworth, as he knocked the ash from his cigar. "On a rather big scale, don't you think?"

"I should say so!" replied Ted. "It rather overwhelms one. I don't suppose there are many finer in the country."

"Not outside the great cities," returned Mr. Hapworth. "Of course, some of those in New York and Chicago lay all over this."

Just then Brewster Gale, the proprietor of the hotel, passed by the table. He was a big, bulky man, dressed expensively, or rather overdressed, for too many diamonds flashed on his hands while one in his tie was fairly dazzling. His manner was suave, but his jowls were heavy, his mouth cruel, and his eyes hard and shifty.

He scarcely honored Ted with a glance, but bowed almost obsequiously to Hapworth and Monet as he passed them.

Hapworth returned the greeting with a careless nod, but Mr. Monet's recognition was stiff and formal. So almost hostile, in fact, that

Hapworth's attention was attracted by it.

"What's the trouble, Paul?" he asked, with the familiarity of an old acquaintance. "You and Gale been having a run in?"

"A run in?" repeated Mr. Monet a little puzzled. "I do not always get the meaning of your American terms."

"An argument," laughed Hapworth, "a quarrel—if it's anything as serious as that."

"I should not actually say a quarrel," rejoined Mr. Monet. "But we got into a little discussion this afternoon that was not of the most pleasant. You know, *mon ami,* that I have quite a heavy investment in this golf links."

"Yes, I know," said Hapworth, pricking up his ears. "I hold quite a block of stock in it myself. I've figured out that it ought to be a good money-maker."

"It should," agreed Mr. Monet. "It has a central position, and already there are a good many tournaments booked for the course. But when I was talking about it this afternoon with Monsieur Gale, some things came up that gave me a little uneasiness."

"As for instance?" asked Mr. Hapworth, now keenly interested.

"Well, some of the expenditures," replied Mr. Monet. "It seemed to me that some of the bills that had been rendered were so high as to be preposterous. There was one charge of

thirty thousand dollars for work done by the landscape architects that it seemed to me would have been dear at twenty thousand."

"How did Gale explain it?" asked Hapworth.

"Oh, he talked of the high cost of labor and materials," returned Mr. Monet. "Generalities that did not convince me. I had an uncomfortable feeling that I was being played for—what is it that you Americans say?—for a sucker. And he did not look me straight in the eyes as he talked."

"Did he show you the receipted bills?" asked Hapworth.

"Yes, and they seemed regular enough in form," admitted his friend. "He showed me also the canceled check for the thirty thousand. There's no doubt that bill was rendered and that it was paid. It seemed all right, but all the same I had the feeling that it wasn't."

"Of course the bill and the check mean nothing," commented Hapworth thoughtfully. "If the parties were crooked, it would be perfectly easy to arrange that a bill for thirty thousand should be rendered, even though the right amount should be twenty thousand. That would make the books seem right. Then afterward, the architect, by previous arrangement, could hand ten thousand back to Gale and he could pocket it for himself and nobody be the wiser. We made him treasurer, you know. Of course,

I'm not saying that anything like that occurred. I'm only saying that it would be perfectly easy to do."

"It is possible," said Mr. Monet, wrinkling his brows, "that we have been too—what do you call it?—too easy-going with Monsieur Gale. We should look into matters a little more closely, *mon ami.*"

"Yet Gale seemed to be all right," mused Mr. Hapworth. "The commercial agencies didn't appear to have anything against him, and he seems to be a man of large wealth who wouldn't need to stoop to anything crooked. All the same, it may be well to keep an eye on him."

"I think it would," remarked Ted quietly.

The two men turned toward him quickly.

"What do you mean?" inquired Mr. Hapworth.

"Do you know anything about Monsieur Gale?" queried Mr. Monet.

"I don't know him personally, and I don't suppose he knows that I'm alive," replied Ted. "But my folks know about him—and to their sorrow."

"Tell us about it," urged Mr. Hapworth.

"I've never been able to get the rights of it exactly," responded Ted. "It seems to be an awful mix-up. What I know is that my foster father, Eben Browning, once owned every foot of this ground that's now covered by the hotel

and the golf links and that Brewster Gale got it away from him."

This created a stir in his listeners.

"But surely Gale paid him for it!" interjected Mr. Hapworth.

"That's just it," replied Ted. "He didn't pay him. All that Eben got was the first few hundred dollars that were paid down to bind the bargain. He never got another cent."

"Is that possible?" breathed Mr. Monet.

"And this property is worth hundreds of thousands of dollars!" exclaimed Mr. Hapworth.

"I don't know how it happened," went on Ted. "Eben himself is all mixed up on it. He's so honest himself that he went on the theory that everyone else would be. There was some hocus pocus, Gale had a lot of crooked lawyers and all the money he needed to fight with, while Eben didn't have anything. The long and short of it is that Gale has the property."

"It's monstrous!" exclaimed Mr. Hapworth, bringing his fist down on the table with a bang.

"The man is a scoundrel!" cried Mr. Monet angrily.

"If a man is crooked in one thing, he'll be crooked in others," went on Mr. Hapworth. "You were right, Paul, when you said that we'd been too easy-going. I'm going down to

the roots of things at once. And that doesn't mean maybe."

"The sooner the better," agreed Mr. Monet. "You have done us perhaps a bigger favor than you know in telling us this," he added, turning to Ted.

"If I have, I'm glad," replied Ted. "I'd hate to see you and Mr. Hapworth lose any money you've put into this golf course. And if Brewster Gale's been crooked with you, I hope he'll be punished."

"If he has, he won't get off easily," promised Mr. Hapworth, and there was a look in his eye that, could he have seen it, might have given some anxiety to the man with the heavy jowls, the shifty eye, and the surplus of diamonds.

CHAPTER X

Starting In

"So, it's all settled is it?" asked Ellison the next morning, as Ted Scott reported for work.

"Yes," replied Ted, in some surprise. "But how did you know?"

"One look at your face was enough," laughed big Bill. "You look as though you had just come in for a million dollars."

"Make it a thousand and you'll be right," said Ted, his face glowing. "Yes, it was all fixed up last night. I'm going to a flying school just as soon as I can make arrangements. The question is, which one? I want to get the best there is. Could you give me a tip on it?"

"Well," said Bill reflectively, "most of them are good, but there are some that are better than others. Tom knows more about them than I do. Suppose we ask him."

Tom Maltby, called into consultation, picked out the Tellson School at once.

"It's right up to the minute," he declared.

"It's about a hundred miles from here and on the shore of a lake so that one can get experience in airplanes and seaplanes. And I know the man at the head of it, Major Bradley, a retired Army officer. He was the head of the aviation squadron with which I served in France. And say, what that bird doesn't know about flying ain't worth knowin'! Strict as the mischief, a feller that'll stand no foolin' and that won't hesitate to give you the rough side of his tongue if you deserve it. His school has turned out a raft of good airmen, an' I don't think there's a better one anywhere."

"That sounds good to me," said Ted. "I'll write to him at once."

He did so that night, and in a day or two received an answer, giving all the details that Ted had asked for in his letter. The terms were reasonable, the place was only a few hours away, and these facts, combined with Tom's recommendation, decided Ted's choice.

The next few days flew by as though on wings. There were a good many things to be bought before Ted's outfit was complete, and with all the haste he could muster it was a full week before he was ready to go.

His comrades in the works were all agog with interest, for Ted Scott was a general favorite. They hated to see him go, but they were glad that he was on the way to achieving his heart's desire. They crowded around him on his last

day in the plant and showered him with good wishes.

"Show them the kind of stuff the Devally-Hipson plant turns out," said Mark Lawson.

"Put Bromville on the map," urged Breck Lewis.

"And when you're up in the skies don't forget us poor boobs that are anchored to the ground," put in Jack Forrest.

Big Bill Ellison was a little less exuberant, but none the less cordial.

"I'm counting on big things for you, Ted," he said soberly, as he wrung his hand. "I'm sure you've got the stuff. You're bound to have some stiff experiences, but you'll get through them all right. And don't forget that you've got a host of friends here that are rooting for you."

"Give my regards to Major Bradley," said Tom, "and tell him that one of his old boys wishes him luck. Maybe he'll remember that little bombing expedition of ours just before the armistice."

Mr. Hapworth and Mr. Monet, on whom Ted paid a parting call, were heartfelt in their expressions of goodwill.

"Remember we're banking on you, Ted," said Mr. Hapworth. "I'm looking for you to become famous."

"We'll be seeing his name in big headlines

in the papers before long," added Mr. Monet.

"I don't know about that," laughed Ted. "But if I don't make good, it won't be for the lack of trying. I'll never forget how good you've both been to me."

The most trying time Ted had was in parting with Eben and Charity. The former's voice was husky, and Charity wept openly.

"Good-by, dear boy," said Eben, as he blew his nose vigorously. "Take care of yourself and let us hear from you often."

"May the good Lord keep you safe," sobbed Charity. "I'll be prayin' for you day an' night till you get back to us."

Ted's own farewells were broken, and he had to hurry away lest he break down altogether.

Once in the train, he gave himself up to reflection. The die was cast. He had definitely embarked upon his project. His future life was in large part to be spent in the skies.

He looked up to those skies. Azure blue now and smiling. He took it as a good omen.

Yet he knew that there were times when those skies would wear a different aspect. They would be banked with clouds, shot through with angry lightnings, rent by deafening peals of thunder. And he perhaps would be scudding along there in his fragile plane, exposed to all the fury of the elements, a mere atom in the grip of the storm.

And perhaps his engine would stop, perhaps

a wing would crumple up, the earth perhaps ten thousand feet below!

For, in all his roseate dreams of the future, Ted Scott never lost sight of realities. It was a stern man's job he was taking up. Life and death were the stakes in the great game. Many as brave as he, as hopeful as he, as skilful as he hoped to become, had come whirling down through that dreadful abyss of space to certain death. What guarantee had he that he would escape a similar fate?

None whatever. Yet he was not daunted. Death came sometime to everyone, and an airman's death at least was instant—and in that sense merciful.

By an effort he dismissed all sombre thoughts from his mind. He was young, happy, healthy and intensely alive. He stood on the threshold of a great adventure. It was enough.

He looked out of the window and calculated by the way the telegraph poles flew by that the train was traveling at the rate of forty miles an hour. Once that had seemed tremendous speed. Now he was tempted to smile.

Forty miles an hour! Why, that was simply crawling. The train was a snail. Soon, in the air, he would be going at the rate of a hundred miles an hour, a hundred and fifty, perhaps two hundred.

But even at the despised rate of forty miles

an hour, the reliable old train soon had him at his destination. The flying field of the school was several miles out from the Wilbraham station, but a bus ran between the two places, and in a little while Ted found himself at the Tellson School and in the presence of Major Bradley, its supervising head.

The title of major had rather awed Ted, who had expected to find himself in the presence of a grizzled old veteran. He had forgotten how young were the officers that commanded in the A. E. F., especially in the flying service, where youth was at a premium. So it was with considerable surprise that he noted that the major was apparently not a day over thirty-five, a clear-cut, well-set-up man, with a tanned face, a pleasant smile and piercing eyes that betokened one habituated to command.

"So you want to be a flyer, do you?" he asked with a genial nod, as he looked Ted up and down and was evidently satisfied with the inspection.

"I hope to be," replied Ted modestly.

"Of course, you know that it isn't a matter of joy riding," went on the major. "Lots of the fellows that come here think it is. We get the notion out of their heads promptly, and if we can't do that, we give them their walking papers. We don't want any pupils that aren't bent on serious business."

"Tom Maltby told me that was the reputation of the school," replied Ted. "That's why I came here."

"Tom Maltby," mused the major. "I had a man by that name in my flying squadron in France. I wonder if by any chance it's the same one."

"Tom told me that he served under you," was Ted's reply. "He wondered whether you remembered that little bombing expedition just before the armistice."

"Do I remember?" exclaimed Major Bradley. "I guess I do! I have good reason to remember. We were going back to the aerodrome the next morning, when we were attacked by three of the enemy's planes. I had the good luck to dispose of one, and then my gun jammed and I was helpless. But Maltby engaged both of the other planes and brought them down. I wouldn't have been here to-day if he hadn't got them."

"Tom didn't tell me about that," remarked Ted.

"He wouldn't," chuckled the major. "He wasn't one to boast. Anything that came along was all in the day's work for Tom Maltby. I must fly over and see the old boy some day. But now let's get down to business. Have you ever been up in the air?"

"Only once," replied Ted. "Tom took me up."

"He did, eh?" said the major. "Just straight flying or did he go through any stunts?"

"About everything he knew, I guess," replied Ted. "He was testing a new plane and wanted to see how it would behave under all conditions."

"Glad to get down on earth again, weren't you?" asked the major, eyeing him closely.

"No," replied Ted simply; "I was sorry."

The major chuckled.

"Perhaps you're naturally cut out for an airman, but we'll see," he said. "You'll start to-morrow. I'll give you the names of two or three places over at Wilbraham where you can get good room and board. You can come over by the bus each morning and go back the same way at night. You can come out with me now and look over the field so that you won't be quite a stranger when you report for work to-morrow."

He led the way from his quarters out on the training field, which was about half a mile long and nearly as much in width. It was almost level, and the turf was close-cut so that no grass would interfere with the wheels in take-off or landing. At the left gleamed the blue waters of a large lake.

There were a number of planes on the field of various types and sizes. Some of them were being tuned up and repaired while around oth-

ers were grouped small knots of people whom Ted took for pupils and instructors. From above came the humming of motors, where several planes were scouring the sky.

Ted looked up at the latter with a thrill. In a few days or weeks at latest he would be indulging in "solo" flights—would be up there all alone!

He was recalled from his musings by the major's voice.

"Among the first things you'll have to do," Major Bradley was saying, "is to learn all about the planes themselves, the wings, struts, motors, propellers and instruments. Have you ever examined a plane?"

"Yes, sir," replied Ted simply, "I've made them."

The major so far forgot himself as to whistle.

"You've made them?" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER XI

The Blinding Fog

"Yes," replied Ted Scott to the major's question. "I've been working for over two years in the plant of the Devally-Hipson Aero Corporation. When I left there I was working in the assembling section."

"I'm glad to hear that," replied the major. "It will make your work here much easier. A good deal of the course consists in becoming thoroughly familiar with the planes themselves, so familiar in fact that in case of need you could make minor repairs yourself without having to rely on a mechanic. The knowledge you already have will give you a good jump at the very start."

If the major had had any idea that Ted was boasting, that thought was soon removed by the intelligent comments the new pupil made on the planes of various kinds that were in use on the field.

"Report at nine to-morrow morning," directed the major, after they had made the circuit of the field and returned to his quarters.

"And remember that, though this is not a military flying field, things are conducted here with military precision. Nine o'clock means nine o'clock and not five minutes after. So with all the other regulations of the school."

Ted promised to be punctual, and took the bus for Wilbraham. This was a pleasant, quiet town of about five thousand inhabitants.

The first address that the major had given Ted proved to be the home of an old couple who reminded him of Eben and Charity Browning and who placed a clean, comfortable, well-lighted room at his disposal and furnished good board at a reasonable cost.

Here Ted unpacked his trunk and arranged his belongings, not least important of which, in his estimation, was an alarm clock that would prevent him from incurring the major's wrath by being late at the field.

At the school the next morning he met the other pupils and the instructors and training pilots. Most of the students seemed to be pleasant fellows, and their reception of the newcomer to their ranks was cordial and unconventional.

Before entering on the regular work of the school Ted was required to undergo a rigorous physical examination, which he passed with flying colors. His heart action was perfect, there was no trace of short sightedness or

color blindness, his sense of balance and equilibrium left nothing to be desired.

The doctor's attestation to these facts caused Ted to draw a great sigh of relief. For, though he had believed himself to be in prime condition, he had been haunted by the possibility that there might be some obscure trouble that would disqualify him from the outset.

So it was with a light heart that Ted found himself turned over to Ned Thompson, one of the pilots, for training in the elementary principles of flying.

Ned looked him over keenly as they shook hands, after Major Bradley had introduced them and departed to his duties in another part of the field.

"I have a hunch that you and me are goin' to get along fine, kid," said Ned. "Specially, if you've made up your mind that you ain't goin' to be a ground pilot."

"What is a ground pilot?" asked Ted.

"The kind that's always talkin' of the flights he's goin' to make, but goes up as little as possible an' gets cold shivers every time he really finds himself in a plane," grinned Ned.

"Do you come across many of that kind?" laughed Ted.

"More than I want to," grumbled Ned. "There's boys that thinks it sounds big to say that they're aviators. Sounds hero-like an' all

that. Impresses the girls. So they just learn enough so that they can waggle a joy stick, an' that's all they ever amount to."

"Well, I don't think you need worry over me," laughed Ted. "I'm here to learn flying from A to Z, and I'm depending on you to teach it to me."

"Good!" said Ned. "Now just jump into this plane and we'll have lesson number one."

He indicated a stubby, chunky-looking plane that looked as though it had seen hard service. The cockpit was fitted with dual controls, so that either one of the two occupants of the plane could manage it without moving from his seat. The place for the pilots was directly back of the motor and in front of the main gasoline tank.

In front of the pilots was the instrument board, with all the necessary dials to indicate airspeed, altitude, engine performance, angle of turn and bank and the longitudinal tip of the plane.

The cockpit was enclosed with a glass windshield and sliding hatches at the top, giving the maximum vision. The wings were of an odd design with a slight tip upward that added to the stability of the machine. The struts to the wings were built with a wing curve that enabled them to do their share of the lifting.

For perhaps an hour they sat there, while Ned gave his pupil points on the handling of

the plane. Then, when he thought the theory was well apprehended, Ned started the motor going and they taxied down the field. For perhaps three hundred yards they went, and then Ned lifted the machine into the air to a height of about three hundred feet and for the next hour indulged in straight flying.

Ted watched his instructor like a hawk and learned something new every minute. And what he learned, he did not forget, for, apart from his natural aptitude for flight, he had an unusually retentive memory.

When it came to landing Ned went through what he called "slow motion" so that his pupil could grasp every step of the process. That is, the throttle, instead of being entirely closed, was left open sufficiently to slow the landing down to a third or a quarter of the normal speed.

When the first lesson was concluded both teacher and student were equally pleased, the former because he had found an apt and intelligent pupil and the latter because of the patience and skill of the pilot.

From that time on Ted's progress was rapid. He learned how to be proficient in reverse control, turns and spirals and in precision landings, both with and without power. Later on came the stalls and spins, the falls and dives, the figure eights and all that makes an accomplished flyer.

All this was, of course, in company with Ned Thompson, who, though he surrendered the control of the plane into his pupil's hands, was always ready on the instant to take command should disaster threaten.

One of the most breath-taking features of the course was the parachute jump. Even though high in air, there was a certain sense of solidity in being seated in the plane. But when it came to stepping off into space, with the ground fifteen hundred feet below, it was an entirely different matter.

"Feel kind o' jumpy like?" asked Ned, with a grin, as he saw to it that the parachute was in perfect order. "No use sayin' you don't, for I know you do. But you'll be surprised how much you'll like it. It's jest like sinkin' into a feather bed."

He adjusted the parachute with the utmost care and Ted stepped to the edge of the plane. The ground seemed fearfully far below.

"See you later," grinned Ned. "Over you go!"

Then Ted Scott stepped off into space!

Down he went with terrific velocity. There was a tremendous sinking at the pit of his stomach. Then, as the parachute expanded, his progress was checked and a moment later he was floating in the air, swaying lazily to and fro but steadily descending.

It was a delightful sensation, and Ted was

almost sorry when he landed in the center of the field.

That was only the first of many such experiences, and before long Ted was jumping with as much nonchalance as though he were simply stepping off the running board of an automobile to the ground.

But the most thrilling step was when the time came for him to make a "solo" flight, to take the plane up in the air, fly it, and bring it down without anyone to advise him.

"He's not been here long. Do you think he's fully ready for it?" Major Bradley asked Ned Thompson.

"Absotively and posilutely," declared Ned, jokingly. "He's by far the smartest kid I've handled in a dog's age. He doesn't know what it is to be scared, and that old think tank of his is working all the time. There's mighty few things now that I can teach him about a plane. All that he needs is practice."

It was high praise from one who knew, and it was not belied by Ted's performance, which, on the occasion of his first flight, was limited to half an hour.

He took off in excellent style and mounted like a bird into the skies. His veins were thrilling with excitement, but his hands were steady and his brain was cool.

That feeling of elation when he found that the plane obeyed his guidance and ac-

knowledged him as master, when he felt that he was lord of the air, almost as much at home in the ether as he had ever been on the ground, Ted never forgot! And the climax of his satisfaction was reached when he made his landing in perfect form and stepped from the plane, to be slapped on the back by Ned Thompson and cordially praised by Major Bradley.

With every day his proficiency increased. One by one he mastered the more intricate parts of the science of flying, the banks, the turns, the spins, the swoops that go to the making of the accomplished flyer. He learned the "feel" of the plane, as a jockey senses every emotion of his steed, and after a while the machine seemed to become a part of himself.

Even after the day's work was over, he spent long hours in the evening studying on his loved subject, poring over books and magazines, familiarizing himself with meteorology, air currents, the latest "wrinkles" in everything pertaining to flying.

His sunny, genial disposition had won him many friends among the other students and some of the young people of the town. He had many invitations to spend his evenings in various ways, many of them more or less doubtful, such as poker games and "wild parties."

But none of these for Ted Scott. He cut them out ruthlessly. He was as careful in his training as any athlete. He wanted to keep his

body strong, his mind clear. Once in a while he went to the movies or he spent a pleasant evening in the home of some of his friends. But even these diversions were only occasional. He was steadfastly bent on one purpose.

"To write his name across the sky!"

Tom Maltby had been a better friend than he knew when he prophesied that future for Ted. It became his ideal, his slogan.

One afternoon when he had been several weeks at the school, he took up his plane for a longer flight than usual. This time he was going to try for altitude, one of the essential features in an aviator's training. For there were times when to escape a storm, for instance, a height of ten or fifteen thousand feet might mean safety where a lesser height might mean destruction.

Up and up he went, reveling in the sense of space and freedom, until he was a mere speck in the sky. The height at which he was had long since ceased to make him nervous. In fact, the higher he was the safer he was. If anything went wrong, he might easily be in more danger a hundred feet above the ground, where the room for evolutions was limited and the parachute of no account, than he would be if he were two miles high.

The plane worked beautifully, obedient to his slightest touch, and Ted was regretful when he knew that it was time for him to descend.

This descent proved more difficult than he had anticipated, for, while he had been going through his evolutions, a heavy fog had drifted in from the lake and utterly obscured the ground below.

Try as he might to peer through that opaqueness, Ted could discover no trace of the flying field. He could not tell whether he was over the ground or over the lake or, worse still, over some of the neighboring towns, where a landing would almost certainly be disastrous.

He cruised about for some time, hoping that the fog would lift.

Instead it grew ever more dense, and, to make matters worse, the dusk was coming on.

The dank, creeping mist, winding about him like a shroud, sent a chill to Ted's heart.

He was lost in the fog!

CHAPTER XII

A Jump for Life

Ted Scott's heart seemed to lose a beat as the danger of the situation dawned upon him.

The fog below and around him was absolutely impenetrable. It might as well have been a solid wall, for all his straining eyes could discern, as he peered through the darkness.

Hoping that it might thin as he went down, he descended until his altimeter told him that he was no more than three hundred feet above the ground. He dared not go lower. And the fog was thicker than ever.

Rising to a safer height, he lighted a flare and sent it hurtling out into space. But it served only to make the darkness visible, and it had not descended a hundred feet before Ted lost sight of it.

He was sure that by this time the authorities of the flying school must have recognized his probable predicament. He knew that their first thought would be to send a powerful searchlight upward, in the hope that it would pene-

trate the fog and act as a beacon to guide the belated aviator.

East and west, north and south, his anxious eyes ranged without detecting the slightest glimmer of light. He might as well have been the solitary inhabitant of a lost world.

For perhaps an hour he cruised around, hoping against hope that conditions would change.

A gleam of relief came into Ted's eyes as he noticed a slight diffusion of red in the fog, a dim glow that barely sufficed to make darkness visible.

At first he thought that it might be caused by a searchlight from the flying field. But this hope faded in an instant.

If it were the searchlight, there would be certain definiteness about the rays and a shifting movement as the light swept the skies. But this was a general glow spread over a large area. It was caused undoubtedly by the light of a town.

But the vicinity of a town was no place to be when a forced landing threatened, and Ted made haste to get away from it as soon as he could.

After all, he told himself, the fog could not last forever. He must have patience. Sooner or later he would be able to discern some landing place. In the meantime he must seek altitude.

So he shot upward for more than a thousand

feet and came into the clear atmosphere of the upper air, beneath the clear light of the moon and stars.

Never had he seemed more sundered from all the affairs of earth. He was floating in immensity. It was a wonderful feeling, and under other circumstances he would have enjoyed it beyond measure.

But he could not long indulge in romance. It was all right to be up there as long as one knew that he could come down when he willed. But when that possibility was shut off the problem became serious.

Still, he assured himself that he was all right as long as his gasoline held out. He tapped the main tank to see how much remained in it. It was then that his heart almost stopped beating!

That tap revealed to him that the tank was nearly empty!

There had been no thought when he went up that he would remain aloft more than an hour, and there had been an abundant supply for that length of time.

He looked at his watch and was startled to see that a full three hours had elapsed since he had left the earth. Within a few minutes the gasoline would be exhausted. Then the plane would whirl from that dizzy height and fall to earth like a bird with a broken wing.

With a sigh of relief Ted remembered that he had a limited supply of gasoline in the re-

serve tank. But that was good for only about twenty minutes of flying.

Still, twenty minutes was something, when for a moment he had not known whether he had enough for twenty seconds. It would at least give him time to pull himself together and consider what could be done.

That terrible fog! It threatened to become his shroud. If it would only lift!

He lit another flare and sent it downward. But, as before, he lost sight of it within a short distance. The fog swallowed it up. That terrible wall that shut him off from sight of earth was still as thick as ever.

Five minutes, ten minutes, passed as he cruised about in the hope that he might get beyond the limits of the fog into clearer air. But it seemed to be as widely spread as it was dense, and no opening appeared.

Fifteen minutes! He dared wait no longer! Already his engine was beginning to miss and cough!

To volplane down would be a bid for suicide. He might strike a house, a steeple. At any rate, apart from the mere chance of landing on a long stretch of level ground there would be a smash, certainly of the plane and probably of himself.

There was no help for it. He must abandon the plane and take his chance with the parachute.

He looked at his altimeter and saw that he

was up about three thousand feet—more than half a mile above the earth.

With the utmost care Ted made sure that his connection with the parachute was all right. Then he stepped to the edge of the plane. He hoped that at that moment Charity was praying for him.

A moment more and he was hurtling down through space! Then the parachute opened and his progress was halted.

With a sigh of relief Ted recognized that the parachute was working perfectly, but where would he bring up? He crossed his legs lest he straddle a fence, the ridgepole of a house or some other obstruction.

Then a new alarm seized him. Above him he could hear the dying moan of the airplane as it spiraled about, sinking lower and lower.

When that moaning ceased he knew that the heavy plane would come crashing down like a catapult. If it struck him, his career would be ended then and there.

But he was helpless. He could not change his direction. He listened to that ominous moaning until suddenly it ceased.

Then there was a rush, and the plane tore down through the fog, missing him by a hair's breadth as it passed.

He listened for the crash as it should strike the earth. He hoped devoutly that no one would be beneath it.

But it was not the sound of a crash that came to his straining ears. It was a splash.

A moment later Ted himself struck the water and was engulfed!

Down through the cool, green water he went, until his descent was checked by the parachute also striking the surface. Then he came up again, spluttering and trying to brush the water from his eyes.

After the first shock of his submersion, he had felt no special alarm. He was a strong swimmer and knew that he could keep afloat for hours if occasion demanded.

But terror shot through his veins when he felt himself entangled in the folds of his parachute. It covered a wide extent of the water, and Ted was in the center of its strangling folds.

They wrapped around him like the tentacles of a devilfish, smothering him, manacling his arms and legs, forcing his head beneath the water by their weight.

As in a nightmare he struggled, while his lungs seemed bursting. He succeeded in loosing the cord that held the parachute to him, but the folds still clung around him as though reluctant to release their victim.

His head was reeling. He felt that his senses were going.

With an almost superhuman effort he worked himself free, dived as deeply as he could, and

struck out, hoping that he could keep his breath long enough to get beyond the rim of the parachute.

He grazed the edge of it when at last he rose, but he had won clear of it. He was too exhausted to swim further, but turned over on his back and floated until he was able to regain some of his strength.

He had escaped the danger of smothering. But, for all he knew, he might be several miles from land. His heavy aviator's suit was cumbrous and weighed him down. The mental strain under which he had been, combined with his struggle to get rid of his entanglement, had told on his physical strength.

When at last he had sufficiently rested he turned over and looked about. The fog hung heavily over the water and he could see nothing. But it seemed to him that he could hear a gentle murmur, like that of waves lapping a beach.

He struck out in the direction of the sound and before long, to his infinite delight, felt his foot scrape bottom. Then he rose to his feet and waded out to solid land.

There he sank down to rest and collect his bewildered thoughts.

In the last half hour he had been in or on the three elements, air, water, land. Twice he had been in imminent peril of his life. But he had escaped unscathed, sound in wind and limb.

"Mark would certainly say that I must have had a rabbit's foot concealed about me somewhere," Ted said to himself, with a grin. "I'll tell the world there's nothing dull about flying."

At a little distance he saw a mass of something protruding from the water, which, on closer inspection, revealed itself as the fallen plane. It had come down a little closer to the shore than had Ted himself.

Ted was delighted at the discovery. He had given up the plane as hopelessly lost. Now there was a chance that the water had broken the fall so that it could be repaired with but little expense.

Ted rested but a little while and then got to his feet. He had not the slightest idea of where he was. But he felt sure that the body of water into which he had fallen must be the lake that bordered the flying field. At the worst, he could not be many miles away from the school.

He made his way out from the shore until he reached a road. At a little distance he saw the oncoming lights of an automobile. He stepped out into the glare and waved. Then he moved aside as the car came to a stop.

"What is it?" asked a young fellow seated at the wheel, and Ted, to his satisfaction, recognized the voice as that of Al Bryson, one of his acquaintances in Wilbraham.

"That you, Al?" asked Ted. "This is Ted Scott."

"Hello, Ted," replied Al cordially. "Where did you come from?"

"From the clouds," grinned Ted. "Gas gave out and I had to make a parachute jump. I'll tell you about it as we go along. But just at present I don't know where I am, and I want to get to the Tellson School as quickly as I can."

"Jump right in, and I'll get you over there in a jiffy," returned Al. "It's only about three miles from here. It isn't often I have a chance to help a visitor from the skies," he added, with a grin.

"Quit your kidding," laughed Ted, as he climbed in, "and step on the gas."

CHAPTER XIII

On the Climb

"I'll make the old bus purr," stated Al Bryson, as he let the car out for all she was worth.

It "purred" to such effect that in less than five minutes the flying field came into view.

"Looks as though there was some excitement," commented Al, as he brought the machine to a stop.

There was indeed an unwonted aspect of activity at the Tellson School. A great searchlight was scouring the clouds, reaching out great fingers as though to grasp what might be lying behind those frowning banks. In addition a huge bonfire had been built and drenched with a barrel of gasoline.

It was roaring fiercely when Ted, who had jumped from the car, ran into the zone of light. A shout rose up from the crowd of pilots, mechanics, and students who were feeding the fire and operating the searchlight.

"There he is! There he is!" they cried, as they came rushing toward him.

"By the great jumping Jehoshaphat!" yelled Ned Thompson, as he threw his arms about Ted's bedraggled form. "We were just beginning to fear that it was all up with you."

Major Bradley put his hands on Ted's shoulders and turned his face toward the fire so that he could have a good look at him.

"Safe and sound, I'm glad to see!" he exclaimed, with deep feeling. "I was fearing the worst. I knew you didn't have enough gasoline to last as long as this. I've been ringing up all the towns within fifty miles to learn whether the plane had smashed. Sure you're not hurt?"

"Not a bit," answered Ted cheerily. "Wet as a drenched rat and hungry as a wolf. That lets me out. But the plane—"

There was a hubbub of questions and exclamations that interrupted Ted's speech and was only quieted when Ted had given the crowd all the details of his perilous adventure.

"Great stuff, Ted!" commented Major Bradley. "You kept your head and did just the right thing at the right time. No hardened old aviator, not Ned himself, could have done better."

"I was lucky," said Ted.

"Say plucky and I'll agree with you," returned the major. "Now we'll turn off the searchlight and let the fire go down, while you go in and get dry duds and something to eat.

In the meantime, Ned, you get the wrecking car and a bunch of men and go after that plane. From what Ted says, it's fallen in where there was enough water to break the fall but not enough to submerge it. We may find that it's all right with a little tinkering."

Ned did as directed, and the major took Ted into his own quarters, where he got a change of clothes and shortly after sat down to a steaming hot meal that put new strength and life into him.

"I believe I've got some gray hairs within the last hour or two," remarked the major while Ted was eating. "I never was so worried in my life."

"Not even when the enemy aviators were shooting at you in the skies?" suggested Ted.

"Not even then," replied the major soberly, "for that was only my own life that was in question, and I had a right to risk it as I pleased. But I feel a certain responsibility for students of this school."

"One can't foresee everything," responded Ted. "It was clear sunlight when I went up. That fog came up mighty suddenly, but I ought to have seen it gathering and come down at once before it got to be like a brick wall. I hate it about the plane."

"Well, you're safe, anyhow, so forget the plane," remarked the major. "And now," he

added, with a smile, "you're qualified for membership in the Caterpillar Club."

"The Caterpillar Club!" repeated Ted in some surprise. "What is that?"

"It's an organization of airmen composed of pilots who have jumped with a parachute from a plane when it went dead on them or for any other reason," explained the major. "You get a star for every time you do it."

"I hope that I don't get too many stars," laughed Ted. "But I don't see yet where the name comes from."

"You've seen a caterpillar, haven't you, letting itself down from a branch on a little thread of gossamer?" replied the major. "Well, in a sense that resembles a pilot coming down with a parachute. That's what suggested the name for the club."

"Not a bad idea," murmured Ted.

"I'd have been especially sorry if anything had happened to you," went on the major, "because I've come to look on you as the most promising pupil that has yet come to the school. I wouldn't say this to you, if I didn't know that you are too sensible to get a swelled head. Ned agrees with me. We've been watching you, and we've seen that you have all the qualities that go to make up a flyer—courage, quick thinking, good judgment, familiarity with your machine and a certain something, a sort of

sixth sense, that tells you just what to do in an emergency."

Ted flushed with gratification at the praise, all the more valuable because the major usually was chary of recommendation.

"It's good of you to speak that way, Major Bradley," Ted replied.

"Now, you skip out for home," directed the major, rising. "You need a good night's sleep, and you've surely earned it."

The next morning, on reporting at the school, Ted was delighted to see his plane on the field. It was a rather bedraggled, forlorn object, but Ted's heart warmed to it. He was already beginning to have the same feeling for his plane that a rider does for a favorite steed.

"Yes, we got it," said Ned, coming up to where Ted was standing. "It's surprising how little damage was done. If it had hit the ground, of course, it would have been junk. But the water broke the fall. Some of the struts are broken and the propeller's gone ge-flooey, but in a couple of days we'll have it as good as ever."

"Bully!" exclaimed Ted heartily. "I'll have many a good flight in it yet. And some day I'll pay for the damage done," he added.

The days passed rapidly, and with every one Ted felt that he made some advance in the thrilling art. His take-offs and landings were almost perfect; his mastery of the plane in the

air had become equal to that of Ned himself. And he had become so familiar with the bewildering variety of dials that he read them as easily as he told time from the hands of his watch.

When he had become expert in straight flying he devoted himself to the more intricate phases, the so-called "stunts"—nose spins, tail spins, falling leaves, Immelmanns—and if he had been looking for thrills, this was where he got them.

He was daring in the extreme, yet he was not foolhardy. He never took chances for the mere joy of taking them. It was this combination of courage and caution that made him the pride of the school.

When the last day of his term came he was both glad and sorry. Sorry, because he had become attached to the school and its instructors. Glad, because now he felt himself on the threshold of his career.

He had found his vocation, one for which he was supremely fitted by all his qualities of body and mind, and it was a glorious vocation, of which he felt proud. He was now enrolled in that limited band of pioneers who, now that man had attained mastery over sea and land, were aiming at the conquest of the skies.

"You've learned now all that we can teach you, Ted," said Major Bradley, "but don't think for a moment that you won't have much

else to learn. New discoveries are being made every day, new types of planes, new kinds of motors, and you'll have to keep studying all the time. From now on your future depends on yourself. Go to it, my boy, and make the most of your career. I look some day to see you famous."

Ned Thompson gave him quite as hearty a send-off.

"Never had a kid that learned so quick," he said, as he wrung Ted's hand. "It's been a pleasure to teach you. You're ready this minute to take a plane from New York to San Francisco. Yes, from New York to Paris."

"Rather stretching it a bit, aren't you, Ned?" laughed Ted. "New York to Paris! It's never been done."

"Nothin's ever been done until it's done the first time," maintained Ned stoutly. "Well, so long, kid. And don't forget your friends at the Tellson School."

"You bet I won't," declared Ted. "You've all been immensely good to me. The days I've been here have been the happiest of my life."

There are no words that can describe the delight with which Ted was welcomed home. Eben hugged him. Charity smiled upon him and waited on him.

"Safe and sound, thank the Lord," exclaimed Charity happily. "My dear, dear boy. I've

been a prayin' for you day an' night ever since you went away."

"I know you have, Mother," said Ted as he kissed her, "and that's a good reason why I'm here to-day."

"Bronzed as an Indian," said Eben, as he took Ted by the shoulders to get a better look at him. "You're certainly in fine condition, lad."

"If I felt any healthier I'd be afraid of myself," laughed Ted. "I've been practically living all the time in the open air, except when I've been asleep. But how are things going? You haven't told me much in your letters."

Eben's face clouded.

"We didn't want to worry you," he said. "But to tell the truth, Ted, things have been goin' from bad to worse. Nobody seems to know that the old Bromville House is still on earth. We're just keepin' a jump or two ahead of the sheriff. That Hotel Excelsior seems to be swallerin' up everything. Have their rooms full all the time. An' to think that the boss of that shebang ought to be in jail!"

"He may be yet," said Ted. "Most crooks end up that way sooner or later. But don't worry. Just as soon as I get a job we'll have plenty of money."

"What kind of a job?" asked Eben.

"I think I'll try to get into the Air Mail," replied Ted. "I've qualified now for a Federal

license, and I'm going to make application. Major Bradley has given me a good strong letter of recommendation, and he tells me that he'll write personally in my behalf to some of the officials he knows in Washington. In the meantime I'll go back to the works here. Mr. Ellison told me that he'd be only too glad to get me back whenever I'd care to come."

"That Mr. Hapworth has been down here since you went away," said Eben.

"Has he?" replied Ted eagerly. "How did you like him? What did he come here for?"

"He's one fine man," declared Eben.

"Indeed he is," put in Charity. "He took dinner here, an' he said that my cookin' was better than any he had at the Hotel Excelsior," she added proudly.

"As to what he wanted," went on Eben, "it was about the way that hound, Brewster Gale, cheated me out of my property. Seems Mr. Hapworth ain't any too sweet on that feller himself. I don't know what he's got against him, but it sure is somethin'. At any rate, he wanted to get from me all the ins an' outs of my own dealin's with Gale. I told him the best that I could—"

"An' what do you think?" put in Charity eagerly. "He told us that he'd take it up with his own lawyers, the ones that look after his own property, an' see what could be done about bringin' Brewster Gale to book."

"An' when I told him," continued Eben,

"that I didn't have any money to pay the lawyers with he told me that he'd look after that an' that it would be plenty of time to pay them after I got my property back."

"Isn't he a prince?" exclaimed Ted with feeling.

"He certainly is," agreed Eben.

"An' if you heard what he said about you, Ted!" put in Charity. "He likes you an awful lot. Thinks that you're about the finest young fellow alive. An' he's just right," she added affectionately.

"I sure don't need any press agents while you're around, Mother," said Ted, with a laugh. "I'm going to run up and see Mr. Hapworth this afternoon. I've got a couple of hundred left of the money that was lent me, and I want to hand it over."

He found Mr. Hapworth just finishing a round of golf, and the latter was delighted to see him. He led Ted off to a secluded portion of the links, where they threw themselves on the grass.

"You're looking fine as silk," Mr. Hapworth said, as he surveyed Ted's stalwart figure. "Now tell me all about your work at the school, and don't let your confounded modesty make you omit that jump from the plane, for I warn you I've heard about that already. You may not know that Major Bradley happens to be a personal friend of mine."

"Been telling tales on me, has he?" laughed

Ted. "Well, here goes," and he told in detail the various experiences of the past two months.

Mr. Hapworth listened with the keenest interest and attention.

"I still have about two hundred dollars of the money you so kindly lent me," said Ted, at last, putting his hand in his pocket.

"Not yet," replied Mr. Hapworth hastily. "Keep that until you're able to pay back the whole amount, when you can and if you can. It's the best investment I ever made. Besides Mr. Monet is not here just now, and we'll just keep all thoughts of settlement in the background until we can all get together."

"I'm sorry that he's not here," replied Ted. "Do you know where he has gone? Is he likely to be away for long?"

"I don't know," answered Mr. Hapworth. "He told me that business called him to New York. He even intimated that he might have to go to France. Something about his property interests there, I think."

"Too bad," said Ted. "I had counted on seeing him. By the way, Mr. Hapworth, my foster parents were telling me that you had been down to see them."

"Yes, I went down there, and I found them very dear old people. They were so kind and hospitable that my heart went out toward them. It made my blood boil to hear of the way they had been defrauded. I made up my mind right

there and then that, if it were possible, they should have justice."

"They told me what you said about it," said Ted. "It was awfully good of you to take so much interest."

"Not at all," disclaimed Walter Hapworth. "I turned the matter over to my lawyers, and they're looking up the records. They tell me that they've already discovered enough to make them think that Gale is a thorough-paced scoundrel."

"And about your own investment in the golf course?" queried Ted.

"That has a decidedly shady look, too," declared Mr. Hapworth. "But we haven't yet got to the point where we can actually pin anything on Gale. The fellow's as cunning as the mischief and a regular fox for covering up his tracks. But sooner or later I fancy he'll be run to earth."

"I hope so!" ejaculated Ted. "He's made the life of my people miserable, and if there's any justice in the world he ought to be punished."

"But now let's turn to a pleasanter subject," suggested Mr. Hapworth. "What are your plans for the immediate future?"

"I'm going to try to get into the Air Mail," replied Ted. "There's good money in it, and then, too, there's a chance to learn all about flying under all possible conditions. And while

my application is pending I'm going to work down in the Aero plant. They've been holding a place open for me."

Mr. Hapworth approved heartily of the plan.

"The experience will be invaluable," he declared. "While you're in the service it will be up to you to give it all your devotion, but that won't hinder you from keeping your eyes open when the chance for the big prizes comes along. That's one thing in the flying game that serves to keep an ambitious youngster on his toes. At a single stroke he may win a fortune, and, besides, he may win a name that will last for decades."

"I'll be watching for it," declared Ted, his eyes sparkling. "Of course a lot of things have been done already. They have already flown over the north pole, and another fellow is getting ready now to start for the south pole."

"True," admitted Mr. Hapworth. "But mark my words, Ted, what has been done isn't a circumstance to what remains to be done. And one of those big things I want to have done by Ted Scott."

"I'll try to be there with bells on when the chance comes," replied Ted, as he rose to go.

Down at the Aero plant Ted had a tumultuous welcome. They crowded around him as though he were a long-lost brother. There was no doubt of the esteem and affection in which they held him.

Big Bill Ellison clapped him on the shoulder.

"Glad to see you back, Ted," he said heartily. "I suppose you've learned all there is to learn about flying?"

"Not by a jugful!" disclaimed Ted. "I'm just beginning to learn. And what's more, I'll never get through learning."

"I see your hat still fits you," grinned Bill. "Well, I knew it would. I've been keeping my eye on you while you've been away. Ned Thompson is a good friend of mine, and he's kept me informed as to how you were getting along. Major Bradley dropped in a few weeks ago, too, and had a gabfest with Tom Maltby. They were together in France, you know. Tom, by the way, is up on a test flight just now. He'll be tickled pink when he knows you've got back."

"I'll be just as glad to see him," returned Ted. "Major Bradley told me that Tom saved his life on the other side, and the old rascal never told me a word about it."

"That's just like Tom," declared Ellison. "Well, now, how about coming back with us for a time while you're picking out just the kind of flying you're going to do? You ought to be worth more to us now than you were before, and there'll be a bigger pay envelope waiting for you on Saturdays."

"Thanks ever so much," replied Ted warmly.

"That'll suit me right down to the ground. I'll start in to-morrow."

Ted's comrades were boisterous in their welcome. They mauled and pounded him until he begged for mercy.

"I'm fond of you, even if you did cheat me out of that dollar and twenty-seven cents," laughed Mark Lawson.

"I've been dreaming of all that money would buy," mourned Jack Forrest.

"Maybe the offer still holds," grinned Breck Lewis hopefully.

"Not much," chuckled Ted. "You had your chance and muffed it."

"You're back just in time for the big blowout," observed Mark. "Old Bromville is sure going to do itself proud."

"Oh, yes, the hundredth anniversary," said Ted. "I heard about it. The old town from all accounts is going to spread itself."

"Bands, parades, speeches and everything," agreed Mark. "They've engaged a big flyer to do air stunts, winding up with a parachute jump. That will be the biggest feature of all."

Mark's prophecy bade fair to be belied, for on the very morning of the celebration word came that the flyer had been taken ill and the stunts and jump would have to be called off.

Big Bill Ellison, who was one of the committee of arrangements, was desperate.

"People will be as sore as the mischief," he groaned. "There'll be crowds from fifty miles around and Bromville, because of the Devally-Hipson works, an aerial center, as it were! Talk about hard luck!"

Ted was standing close beside him. He touched Ellison on the arm.

"Cheer up," he urged. "I'll do the stunts and I'll make the jump!"

CHAPTER XIV

A Daring Exploit

Ellison looked at Ted Scott as though he thought the latter must be crazy.

"Wh–what's that?" he stammered.

"I said that I'd do the stunts and make the leap," replied Ted, wholly unperturbed.

"But you don't realize, Ted," protested Ellison. "This isn't a matter of straight flying or of an ordinary jump. That fellow, Ormond, is one of the most famous dare-devils in the business. He's the kind that makes the hair of the crowd stand on end. And the jump, too, isn't going to be from an ordinary height. He guarantees to come down from a height of ten thousand feet. Why, we've agreed to pay him a thousand dollars for this one day's work. That shows how good he is."

"I know how good he is," returned Ted, "and I know that he's been in the air more days than I have hours. No doubt he'd give a better exhibition than I can. But I hate to see a crimp put in the celebration, especially

when so many people are counting on it. It's for the sake of the old town and the Devally-Hipson Corporation that I want to try it."

Big Bill had recovered somewhat from his surprise, but still he shook his head.

"I couldn't take the responsibility, Ted," he declared. "You've got the nerve and you've got plenty of skill, but when all's said and done you're only a youngster and just out of flying school. What would people say if I let you go up and anything happened to you?"

"I'm a six-foot youngster, if it comes to that," replied Ted, "and I'm qualified for a Federal license as a flyer. As to being just out of flying school, perhaps that's an advantage, for I've learned all the latest wrinkles in the game. Come, Mr. Ellison, be a sport and let me try."

"No," said Bill, shaking his head, but more feebly this time, for it could be seen that he was weakening. "I can't do it."

"Can't do what?" asked a voice at his elbow, and he looked up to see Tom Maltby standing beside him.

"Why, this young rooster wants to give the stunt exhibition and make the jump in Ormond's place," explained Ellison. "Did you ever hear the like?"

"Well, why not?" Maltby asked placidly. "What's the use of disappointing the crowds and puttin' a wet blanket on the celebration?"

"But he's only a kid!" protested Bill.

"A kid that lots of flyers could take off their hats to," responded Tom. "I'd feel the same way as you do, Bill, if it wasn't for that last talk I had with Major Bradley. He thinks Ted is the goods. I might try it myself, only for that touch of rheumatism that took me yesterday."

Bill remained for a moment in a brown study.

"I'll talk to some of the other members of the committee," he said at length. "It's too much of a responsibility for me to shoulder alone. In the meantime, you two keep this under your hats. I'll let you know a little later."

An hour afterward, following a talk with his colleagues, Ellison came to Ted.

"It's all fixed up, Ted," he said, "though there was a lot of talk and shaking of heads. But, after all, flying's your business, and, as one of them said, it's just about as ridiculous to keep a flyer out of the air as to keep a sailor off a ship."

"That's the talk!" cried Ted enthusiastically. "What am I a flyer for but to fly?"

"But mind this, Ted," went on Bill warningly, "go easy with the stunts. You ain't got to do all that a feller like Ormond's supposed to do. Put on the soft pedal. And as to the jump, he was goin' to make it from a height of ten thousand feet. Suppose you make it five thousand."

"I'll be very careful," promised Ted, omitting to bind himself to any specific promise, "but of course I've got to see that the crowd gets its money's worth. Now one thing more, Mr. Ellison. Of course, I can't leave the plane alone in the sky when I make my jump. Someone will have to go up with me to take care of the plane."

"Sure thing," replied Big Bill. "I'll speak to Tom. He can tend to that part of it, I think, even with that rheumatism of his."

The day had dawned bright and beautiful. Hardly a cloud flecked the azure of the sky. From an early hour crowds had been coming from every direction, by car, by horse and buggy and by rail. The old town, that was now celebrating the hundredth anniversary of its settlement, had never been so thronged. Flags and bunting decorated all the buildings.

There was a great parade in which visiting delegations, accompanied by blaring bands, took part. Then, in the town park, there were speeches by the governor of the State, senators, congressmen and other dignitaries who lent their presence to the occasion. These exercises took up the greater part of the morning.

In the afternoon, there were games and athletic contests on the field of the Aero plant, which had been offered for that purpose. These did their share in providing entertainment for

the crowds. But all the time they were in progress there was an undercurrent of excited anticipation for the big event of the afternoon, the flying exhibition. It was this that was to mark the end of the day's celebration.

In a small enclosure inside the Aero Company's plant Ted and Tom were putting on their aviator suits. Everybody else, except Bill Ellison, was outside, for it was a general holiday at the works.

"Well, Ormond, are you ready?" grinned Tom.

"Do they still think it's Ormond who's going up?" asked Ted.

"Sure thing," put in Bill. "We haven't had any way to notify them of the change. It's Ormond, kid, that will get the credit while you're up. But it's Ted Scott will get the cheers when you come down."

A blast of a trumpet came as a signal, and Ted and Tom hurried out to the waiting plane. In their flying suits and helmets, only a glimpse could be gotten of their faces by a favored few.

The motor roared, the blocks were knocked away, and the plane shot down the runway. On it zipped, while the crowd shrank back instinctively from the ropes. Then, after running a few hundred yards, Ted made a beautiful take-off and the plane soared like a bird into the air to the accompaniment of a tremendous cheer.

Up and up it went, until it had reached an altitude of two thousand feet.

Ted was at the control, while Tom just now was merely a passenger. This had been the compact between them before they went up.

"I ain't goin' to cramp your style, Ted," Tom Maltby had assured the young airman. "This is your day, and I want you to make the most of it. You can set off all the fireworks you want to, and I won't let out a yip. Go to it, lad, and show your stuff."

And the "stuff" that Ted showed that day would have been worthy of the great Ormond himself. His nerves were as steady as though they had been made of steel.

Descending a thousand feet, so that the crowd could get a better view of the plane, he gave an exhibition of speed that made the spectators gasp. Around and around the course he flew at the rate of more than a hundred miles an hour.

Then he zoomed up a few hundred feet higher and put the plane through a bewildering series of evolutions. All the acrobatics that he had mastered at the flying school were brought into play. He did side-drifts and head-spins and grapevines and the fluttering leaf, while the throngs held their breath, stupefied with admiration.

Then Ted indulged in an "air dance." To the left he went over on one wing, then to the

right, on the tail and then on the nose, gyrations that made the spectators dizzy to watch. It was pyrotechnics of the most daring and dazzling kind.

At last, as though disdaining the earth and longing for its native element, the plane began to climb in great spirals, up, ever up, until it became a mere speck in the sky.

An excited murmur ran through the throng:

"Now he's getting ready for the jump!"

Still the plane ascended, up and up, until, except to those with field glasses, it had almost vanished from sight.

Bill Ellison wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"I told the kid five thousand feet," he muttered. "Great Scott; he's over ten thousand now!"

CHAPTER XV

Challenging Fate

When the altimeter registered twelve thousand feet, Ted Scott turned the controls over to Maltby.

"I'm going now," he said simply.

Tom nodded.

Ted made sure that everything was safe with the parachute. Then he stepped to the edge and dropped off into space.

From below, the spectators could barely see the plane. It seemed to be standing still.

Nothing else could be detected in the vast field of ether. For many seconds they waited breathlessly.

Then, far below the plane, a speck appeared, a mere dot against immensity. It grew larger and larger until they could see that it was a human figure, over which was spread out what seemed to be the great wing of a bird.

It seemed almost incredible, unbelievable, that tiny, swaying atom floating in the gulfs of space, risking life, defying death! Thousands

gulped hard to repress their emotion. Others turned away, yet turned to look again with an awful fascination at that gallant figure. Many remembered that moment afterward as the high spot of their lives.

Nearer and nearer the intrepid airman came until the spectators could discern him clearly. The crowd scattered to give him room. Then, as lightly as a feather, Ted's feet touched the earth.

On the instant there was a great rush. Everybody wanted to have a look at the great Ormond, who on that afternoon had added new laurels to his fame.

There was absolute bewilderment and stupefaction as Ted pulled off his helmet and the crowd recognized the features of their own townsman, Ted Scott! Ted it was who had thrilled them as they had never been thrilled before by feats that seemed the climax of human daring.

Then the crowd went crazy. They fairly mobbed the young aviator, each wanting to get near enough to hug him, to pound him, to do all that crowds do when they are swept away by excitement. They hoisted him on their shoulders and paraded up and down the field until finally he was rescued by Ellison and Mark Lawson and others of his comrades and rushed into the shelter of the plant.

"You old rascal!" cried Bill, as he fairly

hugged the breath out of the lad. "Who would have thought it? How did you do it? Ormond! why, you made him look like thirty cents! I'm tickled pink that he wasn't able to get here."

"I'm glad if it went all right," said Ted, as he slipped into his street clothes.

Big Bill made a jocular pass at him, and then hurried away to see some of his colleagues on the committee. Tom, in the meantime, had brought the plane down and joined the little party in the plant. He and Ted clasped hands warmly.

"I kept my word, kid," grinned Tom, "and didn't interfere. I'm not denyin' that my heart was in my mouth sometimes, but you put it over. It went big. Hear that mob outside yelling for you?"

"I'll have to slip away somewhere," murmured Ted, looking apprehensively around for some way of escape.

"No slipping away yet, boy," declared Bill, who came up just then with Bixby, the mayor of Bromville, and other members of the committee of arrangements. "We ain't got through with you yet. Not by a jugful!"

The local dignitaries crowded about Ted, congratulating him in unmeasured terms. Then the mayor cleared his throat.

"Ted Scott, the town is proud of you," he said. "You've put the capsheaf on this cele-

bration and made it a huge success, just when it promised to end in a big disappointment. I want to express to you the thanks of all our people."

"It's—it's awfully good of you," stammered Ted, turning red in the face and hardly knowing what to say. "If it's helped out a little, I'm glad."

"But there isn't much nourishment in thanks, however fervent," went on the mayor with a smile. "We had promised to pay Ormond a thousand dollars for himself, besides two hundred dollars for his assistant. I have here," he continued, taking a paper from his breast pocket, "a check for a thousand dollars. But instead of being made out to Ormond it bears the name of Ted Scott."

There was a cheer from the little group as he handed the check to Ted.

Ted turned all the colors of the rainbow. He was utterly flabbergasted, struck almost dumb.

"But—but," he stammered, struggling for his breath, "I didn't expect a cent! I did it just so that our people wouldn't be disappointed. I was glad to do it. I enjoyed it. You don't owe me anything. No, no, I can't take it."

The mayor laughed. Then he put on a frown of mock severity.

"Ted Scott," he said, "I'm the mayor of this town, and as a good citizen you'll do as I

say or I'll find you guilty of something or other, call a constable and put you in jail." Then he laughed again. "It won't do, Ted," he went on. "We raised the money, we expected to pay it, and you've given us full value for it. Why, if I didn't make you take it, the people would run me out of town!"

There was nothing for it, and Ted, his head whirling, could only accept the check, which, after all, he knew he had fairly earned, but which had not entered at all into his prior calculations.

Then Tom Maltby was pushed forward and received his two hundred, and after a little more conversation and repeated congratulations the party dispersed.

No words can describe Ted Scott's feeling as he thought of what the mayor of the town had said. They were proud of him! Even if he knew nothing of his parentage he was no longer a "nobody."

"But I'm going to find out about myself some day," he murmured. "Some day—if it takes years!"

The roads were black with people on foot and in cars, and the universal topic of conversation was the marvelous flying exhibition to which they had been treated that afternoon.

Not all were joyful, however. Two gaudily dressed young men walked by themselves, their brows as black as thunder clouds.

"There'll be no holding that fellow now," growled Greg Gale to his brother.

"No," muttered Duck, "all these fools have gone crazy over him. They're making him a hero."

"The papers will be playing him up tomorrow as the pride of the town," snarled Greg.

"And if the truth were known, I'll bet it was all a fake," put in Duck.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Greg. "We saw him come down in the parachute."

"Yes, we can't take that away from him," admitted Duck grudgingly. "But those stunts he did with the plane! Why, it stands to reason that with him just out of flying school he couldn't do anything like that."

"I don't know," said Greg doubtfully. "I heard that he had been going great guns at the flying school, worse luck to him. But if he didn't do the stunts, who did?"

"Why, Tom Maltby, of course," replied Duck eagerly. "He's been a flyer for years, was one in the war. He can do anything with a plane. Ted Scott expected to make a pot of money for this afternoon's work. I hear they've given him the thousand that they were going to give to Ormond. Now what would have been easier than for Scott to offer to slip Maltby a hundred or two to put the plane through the stunts and let Scott have the

credit. No one could see from the ground who was handling the plane."

"By George, I shouldn't wonder if he did!" exclaimed Greg, whose low, mean mind readily credited to another what he would willingly have done himself. "But," he added regretfully, "we can't prove it's true."

"Who cares whether we can prove it or not?" snapped Duck. "What's to prevent us from slipping hints around that that's the way it was done? Some'll believe it and others won't. But it'll pass from one to another and before you know it the whole town will be wondering. At any rate, it will take the edge off the hero worship they're ready to give to that young upstart."

"Is that so?" came a voice so close behind them that it made them jump. "Then let me tell you something. If either of you fellows start anything like that, I'll wring your necks."

They turned to face the grim, glowering face of Tom Maltby.

CHAPTER XVI

Nipped in the Bud

Greg Gale showed his big buck teeth in a snarl as he recognized the one who had spoken.

"What are you butting in for?" he asked. "Can't my brother and I talk together without your interfering?"

"Not when you're planning a lot of lies," retorted Tom Maltby.

"Look out how you sling that word 'lies' around," growled Duck. "We're not accustomed to have anyone speak to us that way."

"It would be a mighty good thing if you heard it oftener," replied Tom. "You think that because your father's rich there's no one that dares to tell you where you get off. Well, I'm telling you right here and now that if you spread any lies about Ted Scott in this town, I'm going to change your faces so that your own mother won't know you."

"What were we saying, after all," growled Duck, "but something that might be the truth? It's far more likely that you handled that plane than a kid just out of flying school."

"In other words, both Ted Scott and I are fakers. Is that what you mean?" asked Tom, taking a step nearer.

"I—I wasn't thinking of you, but of Scott," disclaimed Duck, retreating before Tom's threatening attitude.

"Of Scott," repeated Tom, "just because you hate him and are jealous of him. Why, that kid has got more manhood in his little finger than you two have in your bodies. Now let me tell you something. I didn't touch a thing in that plane from the time we went up until Ted Scott made his jump. All the credit goes to him. And if I hear a breath in this town of anything different, I'll know who started the story, and I'll hunt you out and beat you up. Do you get me?"

"And what would we be doing while you were beating us up?" asked Greg, with a feeble attempt at bravado.

"Whining like whipped curs," responded Tom promptly. "If you want to prove it, I'll start in right now, even though I've got a touch of rheumatism."

They looked at his blazing eyes and brawny frame and decided that they would not insist on proof. With a muttering under their breath and looks of impotent hate, they slunk away.

In the meantime, Ted had made his way home in a daze of conflicting emotions. He

sought to escape the crowds, but every street was thronged that day, and he was stopped at almost every step by someone who wanted to congratulate him.

It was only when he reached the Bromville House that he had a moment of respite. For there, alas, the crowd was conspicuous by its absence. Most of the transients were in process of being swallowed up by the Hotel Excelsior.

But this, that on any other day would have been a poignant pain to Ted, had no effect now on his high spirits. What mattered it if the old Bromville House went to pieces? He could take care of the old folks now. Their dear hearts need never know another stab. He felt that he was on the high road to fortune.

He had difficulty in convincing himself that it was not all a dream. But the crisp slip of paper was not a dream. That was real.

"The First National Bank of Bromville pay to the order of Edward Scott One Thousand Dollars."

One thousand dollars! It would have taken him months to make that amount at the works. And he had made it in one afternoon!

He found Eben and Charity on the veranda, their faded eyes looking wistfully for the customers that did not come. They had been too busy to go out to the grounds, and knew noth-

ing as yet of the events of the afternoon that had just been concluded.

"Put on your specs," crowed Ted, as he bounded up the steps, three at a time.

They looked at him in affection and some surprise, but did as he directed.

"What is it?" asked Eben, as Ted drew the slip of paper from his pocket. "All I been lookin' for lately is a notice from the sheriff."

"This is different," laughed Ted. "Feast your eyes on that!"

He handed over the check. Eben read it while Charity drew her chair nearer and looked over his shoulder.

A look of bewilderment crept over Eben's face. Charity clasped her hands in an agony of wonder.

"It can't—it can't be real!" she cried. "Oh, Ted, what does it mean?"

"It means just what it says," replied Ted happily. "I've earned a thousand dollars this afternoon."

Then, in response to their agitated, broken questions, he told them of all that had happened.

Charity wept and folded Ted in her embrace. Eben drew off his glasses and wiped them while he quavered:

"A thousand dollars! And I'd almost forgotten there was that much money in the world."

"And now," said Charity, "you can pay back all the money that the flying school cost and start clear with the world."

"Yes," said Ted, "I want to get that load off my mind. But even then I'm ahead of the game," and he took from his pocket the roll of bills amounting to about two hundred that he had left from his flying school fund and pressed them into Eben's hand. "I guess that puts us a few more jumps ahead of the sheriff," he laughed.

The next morning he hunted up Mr. Hapworth at the Hotel Excelsior. On his previous visits, the plainly dressed youth had not been deigned a glance by the guests of that exclusive resort. But now it was different. The rumor quickly spread that the daring young aviator who had created such a sensation the day before was in the hotel, and a host of people introduced themselves and applauded him for his feat. All of which was gall and wormwood for Greg and Duck, who did not dare to say anything, but watched him with glowering eyes.

Ted Scott was equally indifferent to the applause of the many or the hostility of the two. His modesty shrank from notoriety, and he was frankly relieved when at last he found himself alone with Mr. Hapwood in the latter's room.

"Well, Ted, you covered yourself with glory yesterday afternoon," said Mr. Hapworth, as

he lighted a cigar and stretched himself at his ease. "I was there, and I had the thrill of my life. Finest exhibition of the kind I've ever seen."

"I'm glad you liked it," replied Ted. "Certainly no one had a better right to enjoy it than you, for if it hadn't been for you, it would never have happened."

"Soon or late it would," returned Mr. Hapworth, "for you've got the ambition in you, and nothing could have kept you from flying. But I'm glad to have had the opportunity to hasten it along."

"I can never repay your kindness," said Ted, "but I can at least repay the money that gave me my start," and he drew the check from his pocket.

Mr. Hapworth waved it back.

"Don't be in any hurry," he said. "Keep that for a backing until you get in the Air Mail and are making good money."

But Ted was so insistent that at last the young millionaire had to yield. The money was a mere trifle to him, and he would not have cared if he had never received it. At the same time his regard for Ted was heightened at this proof of the lad's independence and self-respect.

"But you owe me only five hundred," he said, as he scanned the check for a thousand.

"I know," said Ted. "But I'm going to in-

dorse the check over to you and ask you to settle with Mr. Monet when you can get in touch with him. I'll feel better when I get the whole thing off my mind."

Mr. Hapworth consented, and Ted wrote his name on the back of the check. His heart thrilled with elation as he did it. He could fairly feel his shoulders straighten.

"Now there's just one thing more," went on Ted, as he handed over the check. "The interest on the loan—"

But here Mr. Hapworth absolutely balked.

"Ted Scott," he said with mock earnestness, "you're a pretty husky youngster, but if you say one word about interest I'm going to knock your head off."

Ted grinned.

"Don't do that," he said. "I need that head in my business."

CHAPTER XVII

The Air Mail

With the inspiration that came from being clear of debt, Ted Scott redoubled his efforts to get into the Air Mail service.

He had figured on that as his best opportunity to advance in his profession. For there he would come into contact with veteran pilots who knew every turn and twist in the flying game.

There, too, he would be under a discipline which would prevent him from becoming lazy or careless in his work. For whatever happened, whatever conditions of wind and weather, the mail had to go through. It was a matter of pride as well as of duty. It was the kind of work that put iron in a man's soul, and no test was too hard for Ted not to welcome it.

Even before he had left the flying school, agencies had been set in motion looking toward this end. Major Bradley had used his good offices to hasten things, and it was a proud day for Ted Scott when he was summoned to

Washington to take his last tests and be inducted into the service.

It was a wrench, of course, to leave all his old associates. They were equally sorry to have him go, but they all felt, as he did, that with his proved capacity as a flyer he was being wasted at the works.

It was hard to leave Ellison and Mark Lawson, Jack Forrest, Breck Lewis, and his host of other comrades, but it was harder still to leave Eben and Charity. The latter still had her fears of those "contraptions," the airplanes. She probably would have them all her life. To her it seemed almost like flouting the decrees of Providence. Eben, too, shared her fears, but not to the same degree.

But the impunity with which Ted had flown and his proved proficiency served somewhat to abate their fears, and they did what they could to put a brave face on the youth's departure. He promised to write them a good long letter at least once a week, and in all the months that followed he never failed to do so. The bulk of his earnings, also, came to the old couple as regularly as clockwork.

Ted was assigned to the Air Mail route between St. Louis and Chicago, and speedily familiarized himself with every aspect of the country between the two cities. It was not long before he was accomplishing his duties with all the skill and promptitude of the oldest

veteran in the service. It soon became a matter of course that no matter what the conditions, wind, sleet, snow, rain or fog, some way or somehow, Ted Scott's plane could be counted on to be on time.

His geniality and good nature promptly made him a favorite with his mates. He had a winning smile that became proverbial. He was always ready to lend a hand or help out a comrade in distress. Never, even when he had been most warmly commended by his superiors, did he betray the slightest symptom of egoism or vanity. The whole service regarded him as a "regular fellow."

And never for a moment did he come to the conclusion that he knew all that was to be known. He was perpetually studying the latest books and magazines on aviation. Air currents, pockets, motors, planes, wings, struts —concerning all these something new was perpetually coming up. So that, in theory as well as practice, Ted was constantly adding to the store of knowledge that was to stand him in such good stead later on.

He had his full share of the narrow escapes that are inseparable from his profession, but his quickness and his judgment were such, combined with his unfailing courage, that he came through practically unscathed.

One of such experiences came to him when, on one of his off days, he had volunteered to

test out a plane that embodied some novel ideas and that had been constructed by a special friend of his, Frank Cosgrove. Frank was all agog with the possibilities he saw in his new pet, and was anxious to have Ted put it through its paces.

Ted agreed, out of good-nature, and took the plane up for a trial test. That first time he indulged only in straight flying, and the machine did all that was required of it. Then, having established his "friendship" for the plane, Ted went up again that same afternoon for stunt practice.

Here again the plane acted admirably—at first. Ted tried all the tricks of which he was the master, nose dives, loops and spins of many varieties. Then at a height of two thousand feet he threw it into a tail spin.

Down he dropped like a plummet, confident that he could right the plane at the proper time. But something jammed and the control refused to work, and it was coming down with frightful velocity.

It was a moment for quick decision. To save the plane was hopeless. To save his life was all that remained. So at three hundred feet above the earth Ted leaped with the parachute.

It was dangerously close for a parachute jump, and Ted struck the ground with such force that he was flung violently on his back. Frank and others rushed to him, fearing the

worst. But Ted was already rising from the ground, with blood coming from his nose and mouth. He tried to grin.

"Something defective about the plane," he murmured, as he fumbled with the parachute harness. "Couldn't get it out of that tail spin."

A doctor was quickly called and established that Ted had a wrenched shoulder but no internal injuries. He fixed the shoulder and recommended bed for a few days. But that same night Ted made his regular trip from St. Louis to Chicago and delivered the mail on time.

A still closer call was his when, on ascending from an airport midway between the two great cities, the throttle of the plane broke when he was only a hundred and fifty feet in the air. Of course, at such a slight elevation a parachute jump was out of the question. A little way off there was a clover field and Ted nursed his plane down in that direction. He had to strike at a perilous angle and his plane skidded wildly, but Ted's supreme skill in making landings had another illustration and he kept his plane on an even keel and finally came to a stop, to the immense relief of the airport pilots and mechanics who had looked for a certain smash.

Twice more he was compelled to jump at night when his motor went dead and he could see no place for landing. The last jump was

from a height of thirteen thousand feet. But he got down safely, though the last time he struck a barbed wire fence and had his clothing ripped in tatters, besides receiving some painful jabs and bruises.

And now he stood high up on the scroll of the Caterpillar Club, with four stars to his credit. Some said he bore a charmed life. But close observers knew that it was the keen judgment, the unfailing coolness, the lightning decision that had thus far preserved his life.

What was Ted's delight one night in arriving at his airport to find Mr. Hapworth waiting for him.

"What good wind blew you up this way, Mr. Hapworth?" cried Ted, as he wrung his friend's hand.

"I've been out on the Pacific Coast," returned his visitor, as he returned the handclasp with a warmth equal to Ted's own. "On my way back I thought I would drop in for a while and look you over. How are you getting along?"

"I'm enjoying the work," replied Ted. "It's a great job and splendid training for an aviator."

"Haven't got smashed up yet, I see," remarked Mr. Hapworth.

"No," grinned Ted, "a few scratches now and then, but nothing that counts. Nothing much happens."

"It doesn't, eh?" laughed his visitor. "How about broken throttles and stubborn tail spins and parachute jumps from more than two miles high. You see I've been doing some talking with the pilots and mechanics here, and they've been telling me things."

"Oh, that," replied Ted indifferently, "is all in the day's work. Or rather I should say in the night's work, for I do almost all my flying then."

"More dangerous than day flights, I imagine," remarked the visitor.

"Yes," replied Ted simply. "That's why I asked them to take me on for night work. You get more experience."

Mr. Hapworth laughed.

"You're a glutton for danger," he said. "I wonder if there's anything that would scare you."

"Lots of things, I suppose," replied Ted. "But nothing much along the Air Mail line. You see, I've got used to it. Perhaps I'm getting a little too used to it," he added, a trifle wistfully. "I don't want to get in a rut. I'd like to try for one of the big things such as—"

He hesitated.

"Such as what?" Mr. Hapworth encouraged him.

"Such as the non-stop flight from New York to Paris," blurted out Ted.

Mr. Hapworth looked at him keenly.

"New York to Paris!" he exclaimed. "Non-stop! Thirty-six hundred miles! Across the Atlantic Ocean!"

"Oh, I know it sounds foolish," replied Ted, his face getting red. "I know, too, that there are better men than I who will try for it. But I'd like to take my chance."

"You shall have your chance," declared Mr. Hapworth quietly.

Ted Scott jumped. It was almost as though he had had an electric shock.

CHAPTER XVIII

Winging Eastward

"What—just what do you mean?" Ted Scott, wondering whether his ears could have deceived him, finally asked of Walter Hapworth.

"Just what I say," replied Mr. Hapworth. "If you have the nerve to try that jump—a thing that's never been done in the history of the world—I'll make it possible for you to do it."

"But—but," stammered Ted, still trying to regain his mental balance, "it would cost a small fortune! There's the plane itself, the supplies, the numberless smaller expenses that would have to be counted in. It would be an immense amount of money to spend in financing what may be a forlorn hope. It's a gamble of the riskiest kind."

"Leave that to me," replied Ted's friend. "I figure roughly that the whole thing would cost perhaps fifteen thousand dollars. I could spend ten times that and never miss it. I've

been spending money on myself all my life. I'd now like to do one thing at least that would be worth while—something that would contribute to the cause of science and the advance of civilization. I'm not lending this money to you—I'm lending it to the world."

"That's a mighty delicate and generous way of putting it," returned Ted. "But, after all, it has a personal angle. See what it would mean to me if I did it! I'd be gaining fame with your money."

"You've got the most troublesome conscience I've ever had to deal with," declared Mr. Hapworth, with a whimsical smile. "You work ten times harder in refusing money than others would in accepting it. Why don't you regard this simply as a partnership? I put in something you haven't got—money. You put into it something that I haven't got—skill in flying. You're even putting in a great deal more than that, for you're risking your life. You're contributing infinitely more to the firm than I am. What then are you kicking about?"

"You're a prince, Mr. Hapworth," said Ted warmly. "I'll take you up, on condition that, if I win, you let me pay back whatever the thing costs."

"All right," said his friend. "As I understand it, the flight probably won't take place till some time in May."

"About then, I figure," replied Ted. "Of

course there's no set date, and one can take off whenever he wants to. But weather conditions won't be suitable much before that date."

"There are two or three other parties in the field, I believe," observed Mr. Hapworth.

"Yes," replied Ted, "three at least on this side, and they're crackajacks, too. One of them is the holder of an endurance record in the air. I'll have pretty stiff competition," he added, with a smile. "Everybody's heard about them, and no one's heard about me. I suppose that when people hear that a fellow named Ted Scott has the impudence to try for it they'll laugh their heads off."

"They laugh best who laugh last," replied Walter Hapworth, "and I have a hunch that Ted Scott is going to have the last laugh. Well, let's figure about the middle or latter half of May. That would give us about two months to build the plane and get it to Curtiss Field, New York, where the start's to take place. Will that be time enough?"

"Plenty, I should think," returned Ted, after a moment of silent figuring.

"Any particular type of plane you have in mind?" asked Mr. Hapworth.

"A monoplane," replied Ted promptly. "I think for a trip like that it would lay over any of the others. I've got a few ideas of my own I'd like to put in it—things that have come from my experience in flying for the last few

months. You see, I'll have to carry a large amount of gasoline, and I'd want to have that taken into account in the construction of the wings, so as to give greater lifting power. Then, too, I have a plan for the improvement of streamlines so as to diminish the wind resistance. I also have a few other wrinkles that I'd like to talk over, anyway, with the builder of the plane."

"Fine!" exclaimed Mr. Hapworth. "Now let me tell you what I'd suggest. I've bought a controlling interest in an airplane factory out in California—at San Francisco. It's the biggest thing of the kind on the Pacific Coast. They're developing a new type of monoplane out there that they think is a dandy. It's the pride of the shops. I'll telegraph them to-morrow to start building one of them especially for this New York to Paris trip."

"Bully!" exclaimed Ted. "I'll be there with bells on. Oh, Mr. Hapworth, how can I thank you enough?"

"By winning the New York to Paris flight and the twenty-five thousand dollars that goes with it," answered Mr. Hapworth, with a smile.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars!" murmured Ted, to whom the sum seemed an amount beyond the dreams of avarice.

"Yes. But that isn't a circumstance to what it will really mean," returned his visitor.

"The man that actually makes that flight will reap hundreds of thousands of dollars from it. The money will simply pour in upon him in a golden flood. But I'll have to be going now," he said, as he rose. "I want to notify our San Francisco plant to get busy right away. I'll depend on you for your part to see the proper officials of the Air Mail and get their consent to the project."

With a warm handclasp the friends separated, and then Ted went to his room and tried to get his scattered thoughts together. In the last hour an amazing thing had happened to him which he found it hard to realize.

For weeks he had been thinking of that New York to Paris flight and eagerly devouring every item of news in connection with it. He had longed to take part in it, for he felt convinced that he would have a chance.

He was not blind to the terrible danger connected with the enterprise. The flight above those ocean wastes with only the sun and stars to keep him company! The dreadful perils of the merciless billows beneath and of fog and sleet above! The slightest mishap to his plane might mean death, nay, almost certainly *would* mean death.

On the other hand, if he did make it, he would win undying fame. Then indeed Tom Maltby's prophecy would come true that Ted Scott would "write his name across the sky."

At the earliest opportunity he sought out Branscomb, the head of his division and asked him for leave of absence, explaining why he wanted it.

Branscomb at first was thunderstruck.

"Want to commit suicide?" he asked.

"Not exactly," grinned Ted. "Am I such a rotten pilot that that's the only outcome?"

"Not at all," replied Branscomb emphatically. "You're the best pilot in this division, and I'd be willing to back you against anyone in the world. But I don't think anyone can do it. There are too many chances of disaster. You're taking an awful risk, my boy."

"I know it," agreed Ted. "But I've thought it over from every angle and I've determined if I can get my leave of absence, to make the effort."

"I'm prouder of your pluck than I am of your judgment," returned his chief. "But if you've made up your mind, why, go to it, and every man in the mail service will be rooting for you. If you win, you'll cover the whole service with glory. Of course, I'll fix it up so that you can have an indefinite leave of absence."

All of Ted's comrades in the division were as astonished as their chief when they learned of Ted's determination. Opinion was divided as to whether he could do it or not. They believed that he could, if anyone could. But there

was the rub. If anyone could! It seemed like flirting with death.

In a few days more the formalities were completed, and Ted, with the warmest good wishes from his friends, took the train for California.

At San Francisco he found a cordial welcome awaiting him, together with a vast deal of curiosity as to the make-up of the audacious youngster who was going to try the conquest of the Atlantic. They were amazed at first at his youth, and there was much shaking of heads at his daring.

But his winning smile and personality won them all, and the skill in flying that he promptly demonstrated when occasion offered made them think that perhaps he had a chance after all. And their respect was deepened by his thorough knowledge of the construction of planes and the keen suggestions he made, as the building of his own plane progressed.

Into that plane, which was to bear him and his fortunes, Ted put all his thought and heart. He grew to have an affection for it, as though it had been a living thing. Once he drew himself up with a grin as he found that he was patting it affectionately. He got to thinking of it as a partner.

It was with a proud and swelling heart that he studied it when it stood complete. It was as perfect as he and the skilled mechanics of the plant knew how to make it. Nothing but the

finest and most fully tested fabric had been included in its construction.

Without equipment it weighed nearly seventeen hundred pounds. With its load, including four hundred and fifty gallons of gasoline, twenty-five gallons of oil, and the pilot, it totaled thirty-six hundred pounds.

It spanned forty-six feet and had a wing area of three hundred and nineteen square feet. The fuselage was made of welded steel tubing with wooden and fabric wings, embracing spruce spars and spruce crossribs.

In the single wing there were three gasoline tanks, and two were in the fuselage in front of the pilot and behind the engine. A hand pump beside the pilot's seat permitted him to pump gasoline from any tank to any other. In case of the plane falling into the ocean Ted could pump the gasoline out of the plane at the rate of thirty gallons an hour, and then use the tanks as pontoons.

The landing gear, entirely streamlined, consisted of a split type of axle of heat-treated steel with rubber shock cords to absorb bumps. An adjustable stabilizer allowed the pilot to trim the craft constantly in flight from the cockpit.

Visibility was secured by looking through the two windows on the sides of the fuselage, through a skylight in the wing over the pilot's

head and a horizontal periscope projecting to the left side.

Ted's instruments included an earth inductor compass, magnetic compass, tachometer, altimeter, air speed indicator, turn and bank indicators, inclinometer, oil and gasoline pressure gauge, clock, a drift indicator for use when sighting whitecaps on the ocean or icebergs, and an econometer, with which Ted could measure gasoline consumption by miles per hour.

A whirlwind motor powered the plane. The propeller, made of duralumin, it was calculated, would pull the craft through the air at a maximum speed of a hundred and twenty miles an hour with a full load and about a hundred and twenty-five miles an hour with a light load.

Fabric and six coats of aluminum pigmented dope covered the wings and fuselage. This gave the plane a silvery aspect, and when it was gliding through the air it was a thing of beauty.

"Well, how do you like it?" asked Mr. Ellsworth, the superintendent of the works, as he and Ted stood before the completed structure.

"Like it?" Ted caught his breath. "It's a peach! It's a beauty! It's a dream! I don't think there's a plane in the world that can match it."

Mr. Ellsworth smiled his gratification.

"I think we can call it a pretty good job,"

he said, "but I want to say right here and now that some of the best features in it have grown from your suggestions. And now, when are you going to start?"

"I'm planning to hop off to-morrow," replied Ted. "Those fellows East have got a good start on me already and every hour counts. I want not only to make the flight but to make it first. That prize looks awfully good to me."

"I don't wonder," replied Mr. Ellsworth. "It's the chance of your life, Ted. I admit that when I first saw what a youngster you were I had my doubts. I knew you'd be pitted against veteran and experienced pilots. But just at present I believe with all my soul that you're the one best bet. Where are you planning to make the first stop on your way East?"

"St. Louis," was the reply.

Mr. Ellsworth was visibly startled.

"St. Louis!" he exclaimed. "That's an awfully big jump, Ted, sixteen hundred miles."

"As the bus has got to get used to making long distances," returned Ted, "it might as well start in now. I say St. Louis, for two reasons. That's because Mr. Hapworth, who has backed me so generously and whose name I've given to the machine, has his home there, though he's away from it a good deal of the time. Then, too, I want to see my pals of the Air Service and say good-by to them. After

that I'll make New York in the next jump."

"From the Pacific to the Atlantic with only one stop!" exclaimed Mr. Ellsworth. "That'll be going some, Ted. You'll be breaking the record for a man flying alone."

"That's what records are made for—to be broken," laughed Ted.

The next day the whole force at the plant turned out to give Ted Scott a send-off worthy of his pluck and the great achievement he had in view. There was a general shaking of hands and a chorus of "Good luck!"

Ted tuned up his motor and saw that it was working beautifully. He climbed into the fuselage of the *Hapworth* and gave the signal for the blocks to be knocked away. With the engine roaring, he tore down the runway for a few hundred yards, and then zoomed into the air like an eagle and turned the nose of his plane toward the East.

CHAPTER XIX

From Coast to Coast

Rising to a height of three thousand feet, Ted Scott settled himself in the cockpit for his momentous flight. His heart was throbbing with exultation. His nerves were a-thrill. Now he was fairly embarked on his great adventure.

He was alone in the empyrean, the sun alone his companion. He was winging his way through the ether. The roar of the Pacific had been in his ears; soon he would see the surges of the Atlantic. He had started out to span the continent.

He looked at his instruments. He was making a hundred and twenty miles an hour, fairly eating up space. Over fields and cities, lakes and rivers, he flew like some gigantic bird. When he reached the mountain ranges, he zipped up to a height of from twelve to fifteen thousand feet to clear the peaks, some of which were clothed in eternal snow.

Another hundred miles! and still another

hundred! He was traveling like the wind. His motor was working like a charm, with the unbroken hum that is music to the airman's ears.

Then the night came on, the dusk gradually deepening into dark. The stars peeped out with their great holy eyes. The velvet of the skies was spangled with diamonds. The moon arose, bathing the plane with a silver sheen. And all through that night, like heavenly guardians, they kept him company.

On through the night he rushed until the rosy fingers of the dawn crept up the eastern sky. Gradually the hues deepened until all the horizon was aflame. Still on the plane went with its fearless pilot, on and on and on!

Then Ted saw the Mississippi, unwinding like an endless ribbon, bearing its mighty flood of waters to the Gulf, and on its bank he saw the towers of a great city. St. Louis! He had reached the goal that he had set himself. In fourteen hours and a half of headlong flight he had covered sixteen hundred miles.

Down from the skies the lone eagle swooped in a great spiral. Long before he reached the landing field he could descry a vast number of people. The field was black with them, rushing hither and thither, pointing at the plane. Even at that distance he could hear the cheering.

It was a complete surprise to Ted, for his flight had been practically unheralded and he had not expected such an ovation.

When Ted had made a perfect landing he was fairly mobbed by the throng of howling enthusiasts who tried to get near him, to clap him on the shoulder, to wring his hand. It was all that Branscomb and his old comrades of the Air Mail service could do to rush him off the field and into a place where he could catch his breath.

Even there the reporters searched him out and would not be denied, and the screaming headlines in the afternoon papers told that a new star had risen in the flying firmament.

It was not in human nature not to be delighted with such a welcome, but Ted in his modesty was bewildered. His head was in a whirl. To him it did not seem that he had done much, and he was overwhelmed by the tumultuous reception accorded him.

Mr. Hapworth got Ted to himself after a while and fairly hugged him in his enthusiasm.

"I knew I was backing a winner!" he cried exultingly.

"Don't be too sure," replied Ted. "This is only the first lap of a long journey."

"But a mighty brilliant one," returned Hapworth, "and a happy omen of what is to come. Ted, you're the real goods!"

It was a long time before they could talk of anything but the coming transatlantic flight. Then, at a mention of Bromville, Mr. Hapworth remarked:

"It's too bad that Mr. Monet isn't here. I told you that he was likely to be called to France. Well, he has been."

"I'm sorry," replied Ted. "I had counted on seeing him and thanking him."

"I'm sorry on another account too," observed Mr. Hapworth. "He's got some data on Brewster Gale that I'd wanted to get to supplement my own. I think we're winding a net about that crafty old rascal, Ted. I've already unearthed some things that may come mighty near to putting him in jail. That is, if he doesn't come across and make restitution to the Brownings, as well as straighten out his dealings with Mr. Monet and myself. If Monet were here now we could begin putting the screws on Gale. As it is, we may have to wait till he gets back."

"Go to it," urged Ted. "That fellow Gale deserves punishment, if ever anyone did."

"You must be my guest while you're in the city," remarked Mr. Hapworth.

"Sorry," answered Ted, "but I'm taking off to-night. I'm just going to snatch an hour or two of sleep and then I'll be on my way. Thank you, just the same."

"So soon?" queried Mr. Hapworth. "Don't work yourself too hard, Ted."

"I'm fit as a fiddle," replied Ted, "and I'm crazy to get to New York. Those other flyers have been preparing for weeks and may

take off at any time. I can't lose a minute."

"I suppose you're right," agreed Mr. Hapworth reluctantly. "I'm going to New York myself in a couple of days and I'll be on hand to wish you luck when you start on the ocean voyage."

Six hours of sleep, two more examining his machine and then the time for refueling, and again Ted Scott mounted into the skies for the last lap of his transcontinental journey.

The weather still continued perfect, with just enough of a following wind to speed the plane on its way, and Ted made more rapid time on this second leg than he had on the first. The miles were covered like magic.

But fast as Ted went, his reputation raced ahead of him. St. Louis had been stirred at first. Now all America was waking up and asking about this young Lochinvar who was coming out of the West, this daring youngster who had the audacity to dream that he could conquer the Atlantic.

For, up to that time, not one in thousands had ever heard his name. From time to time there had come rumors from the Pacific Slope that a young fellow—what was his name? Scott, perhaps—well, it didn't matter—was having a plane built with which he meant to compete for the twenty-five thousand dollar prize offered for the first non-stop flight from New York to Paris, and an indulgent smile

went around when the matter was mentioned.

For of course it was ridiculous. To be sure, you had to hand it to the lad—he was there with the nerve, and you couldn't blame a fellow for trying. But to think that a practically unknown youth could succeed in such a gigantic task! Piffle! and again, piffle!

Had not Fonck, the celebrated French ace, come to grief when he had planned it the year before? Had not Nungesser and Coli just a few weeks ago soared into the unknown, probably to their death, since nothing more had been heard of them? Those men were masters of the art of flying. How could a novice hope to succeed when such men had failed? Too bad! So young a lad too! Too young to die!

But of course when he came East—if he ever got so far—there would be wise heads to dissuade him from committing suicide. Veteran pilots would take him aside and talk to him like a father, and the kid would see that they were right. So there was no need of worrying about it.

This was the state of public opinion—as far as the public bothered enough to think about it at all—that prevailed when Ted hopped off in California.

But his landing in St. Louis created a profound revulsion of feeling everywhere. It was flashed all over the continent. Editors and reporters got busy. They dragged out the rec-

ords and found that no man traveling alone had ever made sixteen hundred miles in a single jump in such swift time.

H'm! That was something to think about.

What else was this, too, that records showed? Member of the Caterpillar Club, eh? And not only that, but a four star member! Four times he had saved himself from certain death by leaping into the air, and each time under circumstances that would have proved fatal except for remarkable coolness and quick thinking. One leap had even been from a height of thirteen thousand feet—at night!

H'm! That would bear a lot of thinking about. Hadn't they been too quick in their snap judgments?

And now, even while they were studying the records, the click of the telegraph was telling them of city after city that was being passed over like a streak by this young viking of the skies, as he tore through the nine hundred miles of space that intervened between St. Louis and New York.

Something startling was happening and they had been blind to it. History was being made by that meteor streaking across the skies. "Wake up, you editors. Wake up, you reporters. Get busy. Snap into it. Front page! Big headlines! Cut the other stories. Play it up. Hustle a bunch out to Curtiss Field. Don't stand there staring. Jump!"

So it was that while Ted, unknowing, was watching the landscape slip away behind him, the presses of all the papers of the great metropolis were humming with big news stories, of which he was the central figure. In a night he had become famous, and his name was on more lips than that of any other in the United States.

In the early dawn he came in sight of the Hudson. He crossed the Palisades, and the largest city of the New World lay spread out beneath him. Far to the right he saw the surging billows of the Atlantic—that mighty ocean against which he was so soon to pit his strength.

Over the East River he went, following the indication of his compass, and a few minutes later was hovering over Curtiss Field.

In two jumps Ted Scott had crossed the continent!

CHAPTER XX

Off for Paris

The *Hapworth,* gleaming like a silver streak in the morning sun, circled about the field, looking for a landing. Ted picked out a smooth expanse and came down as gracefully as a swan.

Scarcely had the plane ended its run than it was surrounded by an eager group of pilots, reporters, and aviation enthusiasts. They had not expected him so soon, for on this jump, as on the previous one, he had shattered all calculations in the matter of time.

Ted stuck his head out of one of the windows with the genial smile that endeared him to all who knew him and that was yet to become famous all over the world.

"Hello, fellows!" he said, with a wave of the hand that included them all. "Glad to see you."

There was a tumult of boisterous cheers and responses, and in a moment he had been hauled out of the plane and found himself the center

of a sea of faces, all alight with excitement and enthusiasm over his exploits.

Questions were hurled at him thick and fast, and he tried to answer them as best he could.

Did he know that he had made a record for transcontinental flight? No, he hadn't figured that out particularly. He'd been too busy guiding his plane. Was he really going to compete in the New York to Paris flight? Sure, he was! That was what he had come to New York for! When did he expect to take off? Just as soon as he had secured his supplies and the weather conditions permitted.

Whom was he going to take along with him? Nobody. What? Say that again! Nobody. But all the other contestants were going in twos. Yes, Ted knew that. But do you know that, even if you succeed, you may have to go forty hours or more without sleep? Yes, Ted figured that he could do that on a pinch.

So on until even the fertile reporters could find nothing else to ask. Ted answered all their questions simply and frankly. He had nothing to conceal. And withal he was so modest and unassuming that even the reporters warmed to him at once. No swaggering, no braggadocio. He was the shyest hero that they had met in all their experience.

From that time on the public appetite was avid for every detail connected with the gallant young aviator and his plane. His doings had

a bigger place in the newspapers than that accorded to any other single person in the country.

What pleased Ted most was the friendly attitude of his rivals. Rivals they were in the most determined sense, but with it all they were gallant sportsmen. There was nothing mean and petty in their treatment of the newcomer.

So they put all their maps and charts and information at Ted's disposal, and he did the same to them. Often they could be seen together, chatting like brothers, discussing the relative merits or demerits of different types of planes and motors.

One thing that saddened Ted was that one of his competitors, of whom he had expected five, had already met with death. The gallant Marston with his associate, while on a trial flight, had been forced to descend, and what had seemed to be a meadow turned out to be a marsh. The nose of the plane had plunged into the muck and both of the aviators had been instantly killed.

Of the four competitors who were left, one had attained world fame for daring flights and another held the endurance record. They were rivals worthy of any man's steel.

There was no doubt that of all the flyers Ted had captured the popular imagination. This was due not only to the romantic circumstances

of his transcontinental flight, but to his youth and his winning personality.

Then, too, he was going alone. There was something about the thought of that solitary young figure winging its way across the ocean wastes that stirred the world to the quick. No companion to assist in time of need, to help him if the plane went wrong, to take control while he gained much needed sleep. Alone, he would challenge fate, dare the dangers of storm and sleet and fog. It was a gauntlet superbly thrown down at the feet of destiny.

Not but what there was much discussion and shaking of heads at the wisdom of the move. Mr. Hapworth himself, who had arrived in New York a couple of days later than Ted, was profoundly dubious.

"It's taking an awful risk, Ted," he said. "You'd better let me arrange to have some experienced aviator go along as your assistant. I can do that easily. Suppose you should fall asleep at the controls? Suppose you should suddenly be taken ill? All the other contestants are going in pairs. It's the only sensible thing to do. Don't be rash."

"I know there would be some advantages, Mr. Hapworth," Ted replied. "But I've thought it all out and I feel that I am right. In the first place, I sha'n't have anything to divert my attention. I can keep my mind concentrated wholly on my plane. Then, too, I

can use my own judgment in an emergency without consulting anyone else. Divided counsels mean hesitation.

"There's another important thing. I must have as little weight in the plane as possible. Why, I'm going to shed even a lead pencil when I start. I'll need all the lifting power the plane has to carry enough gasoline to get to Paris. As it is, I'll have to carry seven hundred and fifty pounds more than the plane's ever been tested for. Every ounce of weight counts, and an extra man would weigh at least a hundred and fifty pounds. That hundred and fifty pounds of fuel might be just what I'd need to get to Paris."

So Ted carried his point, the more easily as by this time Mr. Hapworth had learned that in the long run Ted's judgment was apt to be justified.

It became a race now to see which of the five contestants would be able to take off first. All were on edge. But the weather conditions over the Atlantic were described as so bad that the most elementary prudence counseled delay.

Then, one night when the rain was coming down in torrents, Ted noted by the latest bulletins that, bad as conditions were in New York, the fog was lifting off the Newfoundland coast while the storm that had prevailed over the ocean was apparently blowing itself out.

At midnight he took a decision. He snatched

four hours of sleep. Then he went down through the drenching rain to Curtiss Field.

There he gave his plane the last looking over. It seemed to be in perfect shape. He patted it affectionately and had it trundled over to Roosevelt Field. Then he slung a couple of sandwiches and a water bottle into the fuselage, climbed in and gave the signal for the blocks to be knocked away.

The motor roared and the plane started down the runway. But with its additional last minute load of gasoline and the wet muddy ground it failed to rise.

The hearts of the spectators, who had been drawn to the field by the rumors that he was taking off, were in their mouths. Was this splendid young aviator going to meet disaster at the very start?

On went the plane. Would it never rise? Then, when a crash seemed inevitable, the gallant plane lifted, barely clearing the trees, and zoomed into the sky.

The lone eagle had started on his flight!

CHAPTER XXI

Sea and Sky

That take-off had been a riskier thing than anyone knew except Ted Scott himself. The clinging mud had held the wheels almost too long.

Before him, while still on the ground, had loomed up a clump of tall trees and a maze of telegraph wires. To have crashed into either one might well have been fatal.

But a miss is as good as a mile, and with a fervent prayer of thanksgiving at his narrow escape, Ted settled himself on the wicker seat that it was unlikely he would leave again until he had crossed the sea.

He leveled out for a while to get speed and then rose to a height of two thousand feet.

His take-off had occurred at a little after seven o'clock in the morning, and he had headed directly east into the sun—that is, into where the sun would have been seen, had not the clouds hidden it from sight.

Below, the earth was lost in haze, and he had no way of seeing landmarks that might have guided him. He had to rely entirely upon his instruments. He throttled down his motor to three-fourths, at which he kept it almost throughout his flight, and kept a wary eye upon his inductor compass.

With that to guide him, he need care little about landmarks. It was a remarkable thing that had been lately devised, and had already proved its worth on numerous occasions.

It was based upon the principle of the relation between the earth's magnetic field and the magnetic field generated in the airplane. When the course had been set so that the needle registered zero on this compass, any deviation from any cause would cause the needle to swing away from zero in the direction of the error. By flying the plane with the needle at an equal distance on the other side of zero and for about the same time the error had been committed, the plane would be back on her course again.

Again and again in the course of that momentous journey Ted had reason to thank his stars that such a compass had been invented.

For any pronounced deviation from his course might have been fatal. He had calculated with the utmost nicety the amount of gasoline that would be necessary to take him to Paris and a little further. But a few hundred miles of unnecessary traveling would set

all his calculations awry and probably lead to the failure of his project.

On and on he went like an arrow. The motor was working to perfection. The plane seemed to be carrying without too much strain its heavy load. That had really been the only thing about which Ted had had any worry. Now he was comforted by the reflection that with every gallon of gas consumed the plane was lightened of that much of its weight.

The sun had come into sight now and the clouds were shredding themselves into filaments that were golden where the rays struck them. Ted took it as a good omen. Nature, which had frowned upon him at the start as though to test his nerve, had now relented and was showing a smiling face. Yet Ted Scott knew in his heart that Nature was a fickle jade and at any moment might turn her back upon him.

Now, through the lifting mist, he caught a glimpse of the land and sea below him. For a time he followed to a large extent the eastern seaboard until in the long narrow strip of land beneath him he recognized Cape Cod.

Then for a time he bade the land farewell and cut across the open sea to Nova Scotia.

On through the uncharted skies he tore at a rate of more than a hundred miles an hour.

He was bidding farewell to his native country. Would he ever see its shores again? Or

perchance would his whitening bones lie on the ocean floor, with only the waves to sing his requiem?

But despite the disquieting thought that came to him at times, his heart fairly sang with exultation. In him stirred the spirit of the old Vikings, who in their tiny craft had dared the ocean's fury and laughed when the gale and waves were fiercest. He felt akin to them. Atom as he was in that immense waste of sea and sky, he felt in him the soul of a conqueror. All the forces of nature might turn their wrath against him. They might kill him. But at least they would never make him flinch. He was the captain of his soul!

On he went, flying like the wind.

His thoughts went back to the friends he had left behind him! Dear old Eben and Charity, whom he had told, of course, all about his project, and who at this moment undoubtedly were praying for him! Mr. Hapworth, who had had his last handclasp as he climbed into the cockpit! His gallant competitors, who had so cordially wished him luck! The cheering throng that had gathered in that dark, misty morning to see him off on that epoch-making flight! His heart swelled within him and there was moisture in his eyes.

But what Ted did not know and to which he scarcely gave a thought was that at that moment millions upon millions all over America

were wild with excitement over his daring flight.

For from the moment that the message had flashed from the flying field, "Scott took off a little after seven o'clock this morning," the whole of America from coast to coast had been stirred as it had seldom if ever been stirred before.

In every city the presses were humming and newsboys were shouting their special editions. Vast throngs congregated before the bulletin boards, where every few minutes a new notice was posted regarding the flyer's progress. Now he had passed Hell Gate—now he was over Long Island Sound—his plane had been seen over Block Island—Cape Cod had descried it flying far overhead—a wireless from a steamer told of seeing it making for Nova Scotia.

Business was practically suspended or gone through with in a perfunctory manner. It was the universal topic of conversation in office and street. What did the latest bulletin say? Where was he now? How was the weather? How fast was he going?

Would he make it? *Could* he make it?

In the homes women listened at the radio that gave out the bulletins as fast as they were received. And the boys and girls were as excited as the rest.

In all the motion picture houses and the the-

aters, announcements were made from the stage every few minutes and were more eagerly awaited than any other feature of the performance. In bed that night millions lay sleepless, thinking of and praying for that brave, lone voyager plunging through the dark over the Atlantic wastes. He carried the heart of America with him!

Before dark Ted had reach Nova Scotia, had passed over St. John's, Newfoundland, purposely going out of his course for a few miles to check up on his instruments, and then headed for the open sea.

Night! And the Atlantic! The hungry, growling, terrible Atlantic!

CHAPTER XXII

The Grip of the Storm

With a queer thrill at his heart, Ted Scott launched boldly into the dark. Now it was to be a stark struggle with a monster that had slain its millions. Was he to be another of its countless victims?

Up to now, everything in a certain sense had been preliminary. Had anything happened to his plane while over the land, he could have probably come down in safety. At the worst, he could have taken a chance with his trusty parachute.

But now, in case of disaster, these resources were denied him. If the plane came down in the ocean, his journey would probably end right then and there. By pumping the gas out of his tanks, the latter might possibly serve as pontoons. But it was a forlorn chance, and probably at the best would only put off death for a little while. Tossed about like a chip on the fearful billows, he would inevitably be swamped and drowned.

The parachute of course was now of no value. It could just as well be laid aside for all the good it could do him.

Even if he had come down on that jump over the stretch between Cape Cod and Nova Scotia, his chances would have been comparatively good because of the number of vessels, some of which had been always in sight and would have hurried at once to his assistance.

But now there was no help to be looked for from anyone or anything outside himself. He must make his fight alone. If he died, he would die alone.

But he had no time for morbid thoughts. He banished them by studying the map in front of him and glancing at his instruments. He was still reeling off the miles at the rate of a hundred or more an hour. Already a thousand of the thirty-six hundred or so had been covered. With every tick of the watch he was leaping onward.

Now he noted that it was getting colder. Not that he suffered especially from this, though he wore only his ordinary flying clothes. The sheltered cockpit protected him to a large extent. Then, too, he was burning with a mental excitement that seemed to impart its warmth in part to his physical frame.

Yet he recognized the cold as a menace, for where there was cold enough there might at any time be ice or sleet and these were the most

dreaded foes of the aviator. The sleet was apt to freeze on the wings of the plane, make them heavy, rob them of buoyancy. Many an airman had come to his death through that icy coating.

Peering out of the window at his left, Ted saw on the waters below him what seemed to be a mighty spectral procession of monsters. They were like so many mountains adrift, sculptured in all sorts of fantastic forms.

Icebergs they were, torn off from the ice cap of Greenland and floating down into more southerly waters, where gradually the part under water would melt and the topheavy structure come down with a crash.

Even while he looked, there was a mighty roar that seemed like an explosion of dynamite, and one of the largest of the bergs toppled over, sending a rush of foam and spray hundreds of feet in the air like a gigantic geyser.

At any other time it would have been a fascinating spectacle, but just then it offered no attraction for Ted, and he was relieved when the onrushing plane had carried him out of sight of them.

But the cold still persisted and grew more intense. Now a heavy fog settled down, dank and enshrouding, penetrating the cockpit so that Ted viewed his instruments through a haze.

This was bad enough, but if it had foreboded

nothing else, Ted could have borne it with equanimity. But a few minutes later he heard a sharp series of taps on the glass.

Was he flying too low? Was it spray? Rain? But the tapping was too sharp and decided for either of these. A moment later his fears were resolved into certainty. It was sleet, stinging, bitter, angry sleet that was beating upon his plane! And now it had become a fierce crackling, like that of a flame.

On the instant Ted realized his danger and went up through the clouds like a rocket, seeking to get above the zone of sleet. But no matter how high he ascended that steady crackling sound went with him.

Then he turned to the right and then to the left, hoping to get out of reach of the enemy. He was for all the world like a hunted fox striving by twisting and turning to throw the hounds off its trail.

He went in every direction except backward. That he would not do.

Not but that for a moment he was tempted! He was not yet so far from the coast of Newfoundland that he could not reach it in a little while. Then, even if the sleet persisted, he could easily make a landing.

But that would mean the abandonment of his flight, for the time at least. He would have to return later to New York and avow himself beaten.

Beaten! His heart thrilled in revolt.

Beaten! No, he would not be beaten! His indomitable spirit refused to be beaten. He might die. But he would not surrender!

So he resolutely kept the nose of his plane headed for Europe. But he noted that he was not going so fast now. His speed had lessened to ninety miles an hour. Five minutes later he was only making eighty.

And the "feel" of the plane was different. It was lagging like a tired horse. The ice that had formed upon the wings was making its weight felt.

Ted realized this desperately. He was in imminent danger of being forced down into the sea.

But he gritted his teeth and kept on. It was Europe or death. And just then it seemed probable that death would be the victor.

Then, of a sudden, the crackling ceased, ceased as though by magic!

At last he had got out of the zone of sleet. He had struck a warmer current of air, under the influence of which the ice already formed upon the wings would soon begin to melt.

Now Ted realized what a reprieve must mean to a man condemned to death, a reprieve coming just as he was mounting the steps of the scaffold.

Had Charity been praying for him? He knew she had.

Soon the gallant plane, relieved of the sur-

plus weight, picked up speed. It had taken on a new lease of life.

With the immense relief that came to him, Ted realized that he had not tasted food that day.

Not that he was conscious especially of hunger. The concentration of mind required of him had taken away his appetite. He took a drink of water and munched a sandwich now, not because he cared for it, but because he knew he had to keep up his strength.

Hour after hour he plunged onward through the dark. Then he saw a faint lifting of the darkness in the eastern sky. Dawn was coming.

But with the dawn came the storm, a terrible tempest that lashed the waves into fury and tore at the plane with giant hands as though it would rend it asunder!

CHAPTER XXIII

Land Ho!

In the merciless power of that storm, Ted felt as though he were a chip swept along by the torrent of Niagara.

The wind howled about him with the shrieks of ten thousand demons. The sky was rent with jagged flashes of lightning. The thunder rolled deafeningly, as though it were trying to outdo the tumult of the gale.

To head up into that wind would have been impossible, but luckily its main force came from behind, and while it blew him somewhat out of his direct course, the swiftness with which it drove him largely atoned for that.

Up and down, Ted drove his plane, trying to find a level where the wrath of the gale would not be so terrible. Sometimes he came down so close to the mountainous billows that the spray from them dashed against his plane. Again he ascended to a height of ten thousand feet. But everywhere it was about the same, and finally he had to content himself with keep-

ing the plane as much as possible in its course and letting her drive.

For nearly two hours the tempest raged, and then it blew itself out, subsiding almost as swiftly as it had arisen.

But all the time of its duration Ted had been dreading lest some part of the plane should give way. The breaking of any part of it would have spelled his doom. But the stanch machine held, and Ted blessed the care and watchfulness with which it had been put together. As far as he could discern, it had suffered nothing from the storm.

But a few minutes later his jubilation changed to consternation. For he detected what seemed a knock in his motor. It was not singing the same unbroken song that had been as smooth as a lullaby ever since he had taken off the previous morning. The engine was missing!

He listened with his heart in his mouth. Would it go dead? If so, a last farewell to all his hopes. He would perish in the waves and another name would be added to the long list of those who had perished in the cause of aviation.

Knock! Knock! Knock! Every one of those ominous sounds seemed to be driving a nail in his coffin.

For perhaps five minutes this continued, and during every one of them Ted felt the pangs

of death. Wasn't it feeding properly? Had some foreign substance gotten into the gasoline while the machine was being refueled?

Then he drew a long breath of relief. The knocking ceased and the motor took up again its melodious song.

Not yet was Ted Scott's epitaph to be written!

Happy beyond all words, Ted glanced at his instruments. His earth inductor compass told him how far out of his course he was, and he swung to the other side until the needle was again at zero. He noted that, despite the storm, he was still keeping strictly to his schedule, in fact, was a little ahead of it.

His attention was attracted by a shred of smoke on the horizon. He looked more closely and could detect the shape of a great ocean liner ploughing majestically through the waves toward the America that he himself had left such a short time before.

For a moment he was tempted to deviate sufficiently from his course to pass near or above the vessel, so that his progress could be reported by wireless and those at home would know that up to then, at any rate, he was safe. But he repressed the impulse, for he knew that before long, if things went well, he would be in sight of the coast and the news could be telegraphed from there.

On he went now, his heart singing.

A hard blow against the glass of the cockpit made him jump. What was that? He could see nothing.

It gave him a little uncanny feeling, for his nerves had been on a strain which he himself had hardly realized.

Bang! Again came the blow on the glass. This time Ted glanced up quickly enough to catch sight of a broad wing. He could have laughed with joy.

Sea gulls! Feathered denizens of the air, hundreds of miles from shore, aviators like himself, winging their way above the broad stretches of the Atlantic.

Now, looking through his periscope, he could see that he was in the midst of a flock of them, wheeling about in graceful convolutions. His heart warmed toward them. They were the only living things that he had seen since he left the American coast, and their companionship assuaged his loneliness. He hoped that those who had touched the plane had not been badly hurt.

But he soon passed beyond them, and once more was alone in that vast abyss of ether.

Then his heart leaped as he descried some tiny dots far below him, tossing on the waves. Instantly he flew lower and made out that they were a fleet of fishing boats.

He could see the men running about on the decks and pointing upward at him. Astonish-

ment was on their faces and in some cases consternation. It may be that some of them thought that he was a supernatural visitor from the skies.

Ted swooped down as near them as he dared and thrust his head out of the window at his left side.

"Am I on the right road to Ireland?" he shouted.

They kept staring at him in bewilderment, but made no sign that they understood him. Probably they could not distinguish his words above the roaring of the motor.

Ted had hardly expected that they would. He had shouted largely from the sheer delight of talking to those of his own kind, human beings. To him their rough homely faces had been almost things of beauty.

Now a rare elation took hold of him. These fishing vessels betokened the near presence of land. It was unlikely that they would venture much beyond a hundred miles from the coast.

On and on he drove his gallant plane, his eyes peering through the periscope into the distance ahead.

Less than an hour later he detected the rocky outline of the coast of Ireland. He could have shouted with joy.

Land! Land! He had conquered the Atlantic! It had done its worst to him, had sum-

moned all its resources of gale and fog and sleet. But he had conquered it!

Quickly he sped toward the blessed land, and at last reached and hovered over it.

He glanced at his map and his instruments. He had struck the coast within four miles of where he had expected to. He had gone like an arrow to its mark. To a miracle of nerve, Ted Scott had added a miracle of air navigation.

As he swept over the lovely land of Erin and his plane was seen in the skies, an electric thrill went through the nerves of the world.

From Europe to America, from nation to nation, from city to city the glad news flashed:

"Ted Scott has been seen over Ireland!"

CHAPTER XXIV

Swooping Down upon Paris

Ted Scott had heard much of the beauties of Ireland, but the half had not been told him. To him, in his present mood of elation, it seemed like fairyland. He flew lower so that he might feast his eyes upon its charm.

On and on he flew until he had crossed over into England, where throngs had gathered to watch his progress. Then came the Channel, the silver streak that separated the "right little tight little island" from the European continent.

Once, in the infancy of air navigation, it had been a stupendous feat to fly across that Channel, a matter of a little more than twenty miles. Now it was being flown across by a man who had bridged the Atlantic!

Over those choppy waves Ted sped at the rate of two miles a minute, and then he found himself in sunny France.

Not sunny now, however, for the sun by this time had sunk below the horizon. Ted in the

gathering dusk passed west of Cherbourg. Then he sought and found the winding route of the River Seine.

On that river lay Paris, his destination, the goal of his dreams!

It had long been full dark when Ted detected in the sky the glow that indicated the presence of a great city. Into the sky rose a great structure that Ted knew must be the Eiffel Tower. Then he came in full sight of the imperial city that for more than a thousand years had been in the very forefront of the world's civilization.

The thrill that went through the lad was such as one feels only once in a lifetime.

He had fought the good fight. He had finished his course. He was no longer a "nobody." The whole world knew him.

He had "written his name across the sky!"

Now it behooved him to find the flying field of Le Bourget, that had been marked as the termination of his flight.

He had thought that it was more to the northeast of Paris than it really was, and at first he could not detect it. He caught sight of what seemed to be an air field, but beacons and floodlight were going at the same time. In America the beacons were usually put out when the floodlights were turned on, and this variation from what Ted had been accustomed to gave him some uncertainty.

Once more he circled the city, but as no other air field came in sight he returned to the first. Now he could see rockets and Very lights being sent up and as he descended a little lower could descry a vast number of automobiles and dense throngs of people. He decided that this must be the place where he was awaited.

Down he came in long sweeping circles, seeking a place to land. The crowd scattered to give him room, and Ted Scott made a perfect landing and ran along a few hundred feet until he brought the plane to a stop.

He thrust his head out of the window and smiled that inimitable smile of his.

"I am Ted Scott," he announced simply.

What happened after that Ted could never remember clearly. He only knew that he was hauled from the plane by a howling, crazy throng that had gone fairly mad with joy and excitement. They mauled him, they pounded him on the back, fought to get near him, almost tore the clothes from his back. It was all the police could do to rescue him from his admirers.

But at last they got him free, and he found himself shaking hands with the American Ambassador to France and some of the most notable figures of the French capital, statesmen, generals, men whose names were known all over the world.

The Ambassador had forgotten all his dignity and was wild with joy and pride over his gallant young countryman. He got him finally into his own car and took him to the American Embassy, where a copious meal was ready and where every attention was paid to the young aviator. And it was a suit of the Ambassador's own pajamas that Ted wore that night when at last he was permitted to stretch out his weary limbs in sleep.

When at last he woke, he found that his name was on more lips than that of any other person in the world. Every newspaper in every city on every continent was giving pages of space to his wonderful exploit. Crowds surrounded the embassy, shouting for him to show himself. Paris outdid itself to pay him honor. Telegrams of congratulation were pouring in by the thousands.

As for the United States, it had simply gone mad. Ted had captured its imagination as no other had ever done before in its history. Men shouted. Women sobbed. All were crazy for Ted to get back home again so that they could tell him how they loved him.

But it was to be some time before Ted would be allowed to come home. All Europe was wild for a sight of him. France held on to him as long as she could. There was an endless round of fêtes and receptions in his honor.

The President received him, the Senate and Chamber of Deputies gave him an overwhelming reception.

But Ted Scott kept his head and was always the simple, unspoiled, modest young American, half-wondering what they were making all the fuss about.

But nothing gave Ted more pleasure than his meeting with Paul Monet, who sought him out at the first possible moment. Mr. Monet was fairly bursting with pride and enthusiasm.

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" he ejaculated. "My brave young friend! The world has surrendered to you."

"You share whatever glory there is," returned Ted warmly. "Without your kindness I would never have been here."

When they could talk soberly, Ted asked his friend about his knowledge of Brewster Gale's transaction.

"Ah, *mon ami,* that man is a villain!" exclaimed Mr. Monet. "But he will be brought to book. I have the proofs right here," and he tapped his breast pocket. "I have—what is it you Americans say?—I have the goods on him. That man will have a bad time when I get back to America. That will be in about two weeks. By the way, when are you going back?"

"I hardly know yet," returned Ted. "These kind friends over here are holding on to me hard. I'm leaving it largely to the Ambassa-

dor. Now I'm in Europe, I'd like to see some of it, but I'll be guided by him."

For a week or more Ted Scott was held in Paris, huge crowds cheering him wherever he appeared. Then England, Belgium and other countries claimed him, and their ovations were tremendous. Kings decorated him and delighted to do him honor. Countless thousands yelled themselves hoarse, reminding him that he belonged not only to America but to the world.

Then America grew so frantic to get hold of its idol that it could no longer be denied. The President of the United States put a cruiser at his disposal as a gentle suggestion, and what the President of the United States "suggested" was a command.

So, after seeing that his beloved plane was carefully crated and placed on board, the young viking of the air, after his immortal flight, came home to the arms and hearts of his people!

CHAPTER XXV

The Triumphal Journey

Ted Scott soon had reason to bless the inspiration that had provided a cruiser for his return home. Had he gone on one of the great liners, he would have been the center of attraction, been mobbed at every appearance, and robbed of the rest and relaxation he so sorely needed.

But on the ship, manned by American officers and crew, every consideration was shown for his comfort. He was, of course, the central figure, and all were immensely proud and fond of him. But they knew the terrific strain under which he had been with the endless rounds of fêtes and receptions, and they saw to it that their attentions should not bore him. When he wanted to, he kept to his room. When the mood seized him, he went on deck. And long, long nights of restful sleep, together with the tonic of the salt air, speedily gave him back all his natural vigor and elasticity of mind and body.

"Rest while you can, my boy," the captain said to him, with a grin. "I warn you that there'll be little rest you'll get when you once touch the shores of your country. All that has gone before hasn't been a circumstance to what's coming. They'll try to feed you to death and talk you to death and parade you to death."

"Sounds rather bad!" laughed Ted. "But I'm pretty tough and I guess I can stand it."

"This old wireless of mine is humming all the time," went on the captain. "They're making bigger preparations to receive you than they've ever done before since America was a nation. And they're going to make you a millionaire. The news came just a little while ago that some people were planning to raise a fund of a million dollars and turn it over to you. What do you think of that?"

"Nothing doing!" replied Ted promptly. "It's awfully good and kind of them, and I appreciate it fully. But I don't care to be endowed. Not on your life! I'll take only what I earn. Please send a message expressing my thanks, but saying that I can't take it."

"I suspected as much," replied the captain admiringly. "I'm glad at this additional proof that there's someone who doesn't make money his god. I'll send the message at once."

During the voyage home all preparations for the American reception to Ted were com-

pleted, and he was duly notified by wireless.

First, he was to go to Washington. It had originally been expected that he would land in New York. But the eternal fitness of things seemed clearly to indicate that the youth who had brought honor to the whole nation should first be received by the official head of that nation.

After that and only after that, the metropolis could claim him. Following that St. Louis had put in its bid for the third chance at him. For that had been the headquarters of the young hero while he was simply a comparatively unknown aviator in the Air Mail service before he had dreamed that his name would one day be blazoned in letters of fire all over the world. Also that was the home of Walter Hapworth, Ted's friend and backer for whom the plane, *Hapworth,* had been named.

To all this, of course, Ted had to consent. Personally, he longed for nothing else than rest and quiet and to be free to direct his own future life. He had been utterly unspoiled by the adulation heaped upon him.

But he recognized the fact that his feat had made him a national figure, and, though he shrank from additional publicity, his heart glowed at the unfeigned love of his countrymen. He belonged to them and they could do with him what they willed.

At moderate speed the cruiser clove the

waves of the Atlantic and, coming at last to the mouth of the Potomac, wended its way slowly and majestically toward the national capital.

There Ted was received as though he had been a king. Washington outdid itself on that day. Thousands had come from all parts of the country to cheer the young hero of the air. The streets were packed from buildings to curb, flags and bunting were everywhere, bands were playing and multitudes shouting, as the car bearing Ted came in sight behind the detachments of soldiers, sailors, and marines, and moved slowly up historic Pennsylvania Avenue to the Washington Monument.

There a crowd like the sands of the seashore waited and rent the air with acclamations as the cortege came into view, and the President of the United States was there to receive him and decorate him with the Distinguished Flying Cross.

In words that pulsed with feeling, the President voiced the admiration that all Americans felt for their gallant young countryman. Every word he spoke was carried over the radio to millions of listeners all over the country, from the Atlantic that Ted had conquered to the Pacific from which he had begun the flight that ended only in Paris.

Then to those same millions Ted himself, over the microphone, spoke a few modest, well

chosen words, thanking them with all his heart for the tremendous reception he had received.

His stay in Washington was crowded with other functions, and almost every moment was taken up from early morning to midnight. But despite all this, Ted Scott's happiest moments were those that he fairly stole to give to his old friends.

He had wanted Eben and Charity to come, but the old couple, quivering with happiness as they were at their boy's exploit, shrank from the publicity they would have had to undergo and contented themselves with urging him to come back to their arms in Bromville, a thing which Ted promised to do at the earliest possible moment.

But Mr. Hapworth was there, exulting in Ted's triumph and bringing the news that Mr. Monet was expected almost daily and that then something decidedly disconcerting might be expected to happen to Mr. Brewster Gale.

A number of Ted's old friends at the Aero plant had come on to Washington to jubilate with the boy who had once worked with them and beside them. Among these were Bill Ellison, Tom Maltby, Mark Lawson, Jack Forrest, and Breck Lewis. Perhaps they felt a little of awe for him now, but if they feared any slighting of them on Ted's part, that was swiftly dissipated by the delight with which he shook

hands with them and fairly hugged them in his exuberance at seeing them again. No, he was the same old Ted!

"What next, old boy?" queried Maltby, in the course of their chat.

"Don't know yet," replied Ted.

"Seems as though you'd had all the thrills that life could give," grinned Bill.

But how mistaken Bill Ellison was will be shown in the next volume of this series, entitled: "Rescued in the Clouds; Or, Ted Scott, Hero of the Air."

If the celebration at Washington had been great, that at New York was even more overwhelming. It was the most thrilling ovation that the metropolis of the nation had ever tendered in its history.

The whistles and sirens of all the vessels in the harbor deafeningly proclaimed his coming, as Ted in a seaplane came down in the Narrows, there to be picked up by the welcoming committee. Landing at the Battery, he was escorted up Broadway, that was packed to suffocation, while from the crowded windows of the skyscrapers millions of bits of paper fluttered down in a "snowstorm." Up Broadway and Fifth Avenue the great procession pursued its way, while four million throats acclaimed the coming of America's idol: Then at the reviewing stand the mayor of the city and the

governor of the State paid their tributes and bestowed their decorations. For that day at least, Ted Scott owned New York.

And it was so for the succeeding days, with banquets, receptions and entertainments winding up with the bestowal of the twenty-five thousand dollar prize that Ted had won by his matchless flight.

On the final day, when Ted stepped into his beloved plane and was off into the skies, where now he felt more at home than on land, his heart was filled with an infinite content.

He had fulfilled Tom Maltby's prophecy.

He had "written his name across the sky!"

THE END

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